FLYING AGAINST TIME

Ted Scott
Flying Stories

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

FLYING AGAINST TIME

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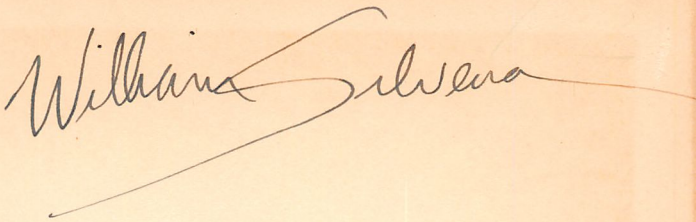

TED SCOTT WAS IN THE GRIP OF A KANSAS TWISTER.

Ted Scott : Flying Against Time. *Frontispiece.*

THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

FLYING AGAINST TIME

OR

TED SCOTT BREAKING THE OCEAN TO OCEAN RECORD

By

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF
"OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS"
"SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE"
"THE HARDY BOYS: THE SECRET OF THE CAVES," ETC.

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BOOKS FOR BOYS

By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

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THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS
Or Ted Scott's Daring Long-Distance Flight
RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS
Or Ted Scott, Hero of the Air
OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL
Or Ted Scott Lost in the Wilderness
FIRST STOP HONOLULU
Or Ted Scott Over the Pacific
THE SEARCH FOR THE LOST FLYERS
Or Ted Scott Over the West Indies
SOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE
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THE LONE EAGLE OF THE BORDER
Or Ted Scott and the Diamond Smugglers
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Or Ted Scott Breaking the Ocean to Ocean Record

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THE HARDY BOYS: THE SECRET OF THE CAVES

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Flying Against Time

Made in the United States of America

TO THE HEROES OF THE AIR

WILBUR WRIGHT—ORVILLE WRIGHT
The first men to fly in a heavier-than-air machine

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The first to fly the English Channel

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The first to fly from Newfoundland to Ireland

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CAPTAIN GEORGE H. WILKINS—CARL B. EIELSON
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And a host of other gallant airmen of the Past and Present who, by their daring exploits, have made aviation the wonderful achievement it is to-day

THIS SERIES OF BOOKS
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

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FLYING AGAINST TIME

CHAPTER I

Money Talks

"It can't be done, I tell you," exclaimed Ferdinand Sipp emphatically, as he measured with his eye the distance to the next hole on the golf links of the Hotel Excelsior.

"I say it can," rejoined Walter Hapworth, his opponent. "What's more, I know the lad who can do it."

"Name him," demanded Sipp.

"Ted Scott," replied Hapworth.

"Ted Scott!" snapped Sipp. "You make me tired. Seems to me I haven't heard anything but Ted Scott since I came to Bromville. I believe if I asked you who'd make the best president of the United States, you'd say Ted Scott."

"Perhaps I shouldn't be so far wrong at that," replied Hapworth, grinning. "But keep your shirt on, old man, and make that shot."

Sipp swung at the ball and it whizzed along

rapidly for a good two hundred yards down the fairway.

"Not so bad," replied Sipp complacently. "Looks as if I might make that hole in three."

Walter Hapworth took his turn and the ball went straight toward the hole. It rolled far up the green and showed no sign of stopping.

"A tremendously long drive," congratulated Sipp. "You must have had dynamite in that club."

Still the ball went on, and excitement grew.

"It's going straight for the hole," muttered Hapworth, scarcely daring to believe in his luck. "By Jove, I believe it's going in! It's in! Hurrah! A hole in one! The first time I've ever made it in my life!"

He threw his club in the air in jubilation. He had achieved what many expert golfers dream of but never do, the almost unbelievable thing, a hole in one shot.

"Great work, old man!" exclaimed Sipp. "I'd rather have made that shot than won ten thousand dollars."

The almost miraculous shot put Walter Hapworth in the lead, and though Sipp gave him strenuous competition, he could not prevent his opponent from winning by two up.

After the showers a dozen or more of the players sat about on the veranda of the Hotel Excelsior talking of the events of the afternoon,

in which, naturally, Walter Hapworth's marvelous exploit held first place. But even that topic could be exhausted and the conversation was lagging when Paul Monet interjected a question.

"What were you and Mr. Sipp talking about so excitedly just before you made that shot, Walter?" he asked of Hapworth. "You seemed to have a difference of opinion."

"Oh, it was about an airplane flight from coast to coast," replied Hapworth. "Sipp said it couldn't be done within twenty hours. I maintained that it could and that Ted Scott was the boy who could do it."

"I agree with you," returned Paul Monet thoughtfully. "Of course, it's a big job; but if anybody can do it Ted can."

"There they go again!" exclaimed Sipp, appealing to the other members of the group. "These fellows are crazy about Ted Scott. I believe if I said that no one could jump from the sidewalk to the top of a thirty-story skyscraper, they'd come back at me with the statement that Ted Scott could do it."

"We're not quite as bad as that," laughed Hapworth. "Still, in anything that comes within reason I'd back him to the limit. He carries my money every time he starts."

"Hero worship is a great thing," retorted Sipp, with just a suspicion of a sneer in his

voice. "On what do you base this beautiful confidence of yours?"

"On past performances," replied Hapworth quietly. "He's the kind of lad that gets whatever he goes after. He started for Paris over the Atlantic and he got there. He flew the Pacific to Honolulu and later on to Australia, and he made his goal in both instances. He went after the altitude record and captured it. A little while ago he made up his mind that he'd like the endurance record, and he put that also in his bag. If you'll tell me of anything he's tried for and hasn't got, I'll be obliged."

"Not to mention his latest exploit when he started out to capture the most famous diamond smuggler in the country and got his man," was the thought that flashed through Paul Monet's mind.

"All of which means that he's simply a fool for luck," growled Sipp.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," protested Hixson Crown. "He's a great flyer. Still, I shouldn't wonder if there are other aviators who, if they had had the same opportunities and had undertaken the same tasks, might have done just as well."

"I take off my cap to the lad," chimed in Will Welby. "He's great stuff and a credit to his country. Still, just on the laws of chance, he's due for a tumble. It stands to rea-

son that no one can keep on forever doing hazardous things without sometime coming a cropper. They all do sooner or later, no matter how good they are. No man stays a champion forever."

"It's like tossing a coin," averred Ed Bertram. "You may come heads half a dozen times, but you know it's only a matter of time before it comes down tails."

"Ah, here he comes now!" exclaimed Hapworth, starting from his seat as a lithe, stalwart figure approached the steps. "The very man we're talking about. Come up here, Ted, and meet a bunch of good fellows and take a load off your feet," he called.

Ted ran lightly up the steps and shook hands warmly with Hapworth and Monet. The former introduced him to the other members of the group, who greeted him cordially, with the exception of Sipp, who extended a limp hand with reluctance.

"Mr. Scott and I have met before," he said stiffly.

Ted looked at him more closely.

"Sure enough," he answered, with a disarming grin. "You're the man who ran into my car this morning."

"You mean, you're the man who backed up your car against mine," replied Sipp challengingly.

"Oh, well, have it your own way," replied Ted good-naturedly. "I guess we both lost our tempers a little. But neither car was hurt, so suppose we forget all about it."

"We were just talking about you when you came along, Ted," interposed Hapworth quickly, to dispel the uncomfortable feeling that Sipp's grumpiness had produced.

"I suppose my ears ought to have burned, but they seem to be of the usual temperature," laughed Ted, as he seated himself between Hapworth and Monet. "What terrible things were you saying about me? Out with it now and let me know the worst."

"There isn't any worst," replied Hapworth. "Some of the men here were discussing the possibility of a coast to coast air flight in twenty hours or less. Several think it can't be done. I think it can be done. So does Paul. And Paul and I both agree that, if any one can do it, you can."

"That's kind of you to say so," replied Ted. "To tell the truth, I haven't thought much about the matter. Let's see, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, say roughly three thousand miles. And twenty hours. That would be about a hundred and fifty miles an hour continuous flying. That's some traveling!"

"You bet it is," grunted Sipp.

"Of course for an hour faster time than a

hundred and fifty has been made," continued Ted thoughtfully. "But in those cases everything has been prepared for the test. The plane has been groomed and stripped of everything that wasn't actually needed. It had to carry only enough gas for that hour's work. And the men have picked out just the special brand of weather they liked. But all those conditions would be lacking in a twenty-hour flight from coast to coast. I suppose the idea would be a non-stop flight?" he said, looking inquiringly at Sipp.

"Sure thing," agreed Sipp. "If the pilot came down to earth for any reason whatever, he'd lose the bet."

"There you are," went on Ted. "Anything is liable to go wrong in a plane, and the flyer either has to come down for repairs or perhaps lose his life. That possibility would be present every minute of the twenty hours required to make the flight. Then there's the weather. You might have to spend half the time bucking a head wind. You might get caught in a hurricane. You might find yourself in a fog and your instruments go back on you. Crossing the Rockies, you'd be in the region of perpetual snow, and sleet might form on the wings of the plane, bearing it down to the ground. And with all those things in the offing you'd have to keep right on making an average of a hundred

and fifty miles or more an hour. Gee, it's a tough proposition!"

"You see, Hapworth!" jeered Sipp. "Your hero agrees with me that it can't be done."

Ted flushed at the slurring tone, but kept his temper.

"Beg pardon," he said. "I don't agree with you that it can't be done. I only think it would be a whale of a job."

"And you wouldn't care to harpoon that whale?" put in Sipp mockingly.

"I might, if it were worth my while," replied Ted coolly.

"Then I'll call your bluff," snapped Sipp. "I'll bet ten thousand dollars that you can't make a non-stop flight from my home town, Boston, to Los Angeles in twenty hour or less."

There was a stir of excitement in the group and they all bent forward eagerly, their eyes fixed on Ted Scott.

If he had been startled by the blunt and definite challenge, there was no sign of it in his demeanor. He looked thoughtfully at Ferdinand Sipp.

"You at least have the courage of your convictions," he said. "Name the conditions of the bet."

"Here they are," replied Sipp, checking them off on his fingers. "The flight is to take place within six weeks. You to stay in the air

every minute of the flight. If your wheels as much as brush the ground, you lose. If you fall sick or break a leg before the time fixed to start, it makes no difference. You've got to take the chance of that."

"Oh, I say, Sipp," protested Hapworth, "that's hardly sportsmanlike. You wouldn't want to take a man's money if he were in a hospital, would you?"

"Cold feet might take him to the hospital if he wanted to get out of the venture," sneered Sipp. "I've stated my proposition. It's play or pay. Take it or leave it."

He sat back with a nasty smile on his face.

"I don't know but what I'd like to share with you in that bet, Sipp," put in Welby. "No reflection on your ability, Mr. Scott, but I agree with my friend that it can't be done."

"I don't care to share the bet," replied Sipp. "It looks to me like easy money. Make another bet if you like. No doubt Mr. Scott would be glad to oblige you."

"I'll put up another ten thousand, then, on the same terms," said Welby.

"And I'll string along with another ten," chimed in Hixson Crown.

The contagion spread like wildfire. The terms Sipp had stated were so drastic, the chances of winning so great, that all were eager to get in on it. In a few minutes among

that group of wealthy men forty thousand dollars were ready to be bet on the proposition that Ted Scott could not make a non-stop air flight from Boston on the Atlantic coast to Los Angeles on the Pacific coast in twenty hours or less.

Ted Scott had been thinking rapidly. Before his eyes stretched that vast expanse of plain and prairie, lakes and rivers, mountains and valleys that lay between the two oceans. Could he span that space of three thousand miles in the terribly short time of twenty hours?

He knew the odds were against him. But what of that? The odds had always been against him in every one of his magnificent feats. They were against him when he essayed to conquer the Atlantic and the Pacific. They were against him when he won the altitude and endurance contests. Odds? What were odds for but to be defied and beaten?

He turned to Sipp, his face alight.

"I'll take your bet!" he said.

CHAPTER II

Tricky Foemen

Ferdinand Sipp started violently as Ted Scott accepted his challenge. That start told volumes.

Ted perceived at once that Sipp had not expected he would be taken up. He had purposely made the conditions so hard that he thought Ted would falter. For some reason, the man had taken a strong antipathy to Ted Scott and he wanted to humiliate him and, at the same time, take Walter Hapworth and Paul Monet down a peg by showing them that their idol had feet of clay. It would have done him a world of good to show that Ted Scott was not as daring as he was supposed to be.

Probably too the auto mishap of the morning added to the animosity of his little soul. At any rate, he was manifestly discomfited, so much so that a covert smile went around the group as he stared at Ted as though he had not understood him.

"W-what was that?" he stammered.

"I said I'd take your bet," replied Ted, still smiling.

"Ah, yes, very well," Sipp said, his face red. "You're sure that you understand all the conditions?"

"Perfectly sure," replied Ted. "We'll have them written down right now to prevent any mistake."

"I'll make a memorandum of them," volunteered Walter Hapworth, taking a fountain pen from his pocket. He called for a sheet of paper on which he jotted down the precise terms of the wager. He made two copies, giving one to Sipp and the other to Ted.

"Where do we come in?" asked Crown. "Is my ten thousand going begging?"

"You come in right here," replied Hapworth. "I'll take that bet."

"Look here, Walter!" protested Ted. "If you're doing this out of friendship for me—"

"I'm doing it partly for that reason and partly because I think I'm going to win the wager," interrupted Hapworth.

"There's twenty thousand more that the rest of us have put up," remarked Welby.

"Count me in on this," replied Paul Monet. "I'll take every cent of it. And if you want to double it, I'm willing."

Ted Scott was deeply touched by the loyalty of his two friends. Their prompt stand on his

side evidently daunted the others, for there was no willingness shown to accept Monet's offer and double the bet.

There were a few readjustments and more scribbling of memoranda. The net result was that forty thousand dollars in bets were made at even money. Of this ten thousand was an individual bet between Ted and Sipp. The other thirty thousand, offered by Sipp's adherents, was taken up equally by Walter Hapworth and Paul Monet, who thus stood to win or lose fifteen thousand dollars apiece. It was agreed that the money should be deposited in the Bromville National Bank to await the result of the race.

Shortly afterward Ted Scott rose to take his leave. Hapworth and Monet accompanied him to the border of the hotel grounds.

"I hope I haven't let you fellows in for a beating," said Ted. "It was great of you to back me up the way you did, but I'd feel sore if my failure to win should do you out of thirty thousand dollars."

"Don't you worry about that," laughed Hapworth. "Any day that I make a hole in one is a lucky day for me. I have a hunch that I'm going to win that bet."

"You're a man of destiny, Ted. You can't lose," observed Monet. "The harder the job the more gloriously you'll rise to it."

Ted Scott, as he walked away, wished he could feel as certain of victory as his friends seemed to. As an airman, he knew better than they did how stupendous was the task that lay before him and how many were the chances of failure.

If it were simply a matter of courage or skill, he would not have felt worried about the outcome. He was wholly without conceit, but he knew the metal of which he was made. It had been tested too often to leave any doubt about it.

But no skill or courage, however great, could baffle adverse circumstances. There were things in this contest that were wholly beyond the aviator's control. The most carefully tested plane might prove defective at a critical moment. The weather was to be reckoned with. A bolt of lightning might hurl him and his plane to the ground. A gale might spring up that no one could fight against.

Then, too, there was that sickness or disability clause. Who could guarantee him against illness or broken bones before the date set for the flight?

No, it was no child's play that he was attempting. The odds were against him.

Ted seldom bet. He did not care to. He might not have done so that day, if Ferdinand Sipp had not been so insufferably overbearing.

Ted had yielded to the desire to wipe that complacent smirk from the man's face.

He had done that, anyway, he chuckled to himself. It was still a pleasure to think of the consternation on Sipp's face when his bluff had been called.

Ted did not especially care for the possible loss of his own ten thousand dollars. It would not cripple him, as his fame and reputation had already brought him a fortune. Far more keen than the loss of the money would be the chagrin he would feel at failure and the consciousness that he had caused his friends to lose the money they had put up.

He was aroused from his musings by the sight of two men approaching. He glanced at them carelessly for a moment. Then his gaze became fixed. He rubbed his eyes. They were —no—yes, Greg and Duck Gale!

Greg and Duck Gale! The bitterest enemies he had on earth! The young men who had robbed and narrowly escaped murdering Eben and Charity! The men who had been convicted and sentenced and were supposed to be in prison.

While Ted is staring at the approaching jailbirds, it may be well, for the benefit of those who have not read the preceding volumes of this series, to tell who Ted Scott was and what

had been his adventures up to the time this story opens.

Ted had no memory of his real father and mother. His earliest recollections were of being under the care of James and Miranda Wilson, an elderly couple who had come to Bromville from a town in New England and settled there.

They were kind to the little fellow, sent him to school and did all for him that their slender means permitted. When he was about ten years old they had died within a few months of each other, leaving the child to the tender mercies of the world.

His forlorn condition attracted the sympathy of Eben and Charity Browning, themselves childless, and they had taken the little waif into their hearts and home.

Eben Browning was the proprietor of the Bromville House, that had once been the leading hotel of the town. He was a genial, kindly man, and his personality won him a large clientage among the anglers who used to come to try their luck in the Rapport River that ran through the place.

A change in Eben's fortunes came about when the Devally-Hipson Aero Corporation, engaged in the manufacture of airplanes, established a mammoth plant in Bromville. Along with it

came hundreds of workmen and executives and Bromville began to boom.

New hotels sprang up like magic and the old Bromville House, that in the course of years had grown rather shabby, found its custom slipping away from it.

The crowning blow came when Brewster Gale built the Hotel Excelsior, a hotel that could compare favorably with most of those in large cities. It was a magnificent building with a superb golf course attached that drew tournaments in which golfers from all over the country competed.

This was bad enough from Eben's point of view, but what made him writhe in anger was the fact that he had once owned all the ground on which the hotel and the golf course were located and had been swindled out of it by Brewster Gale.

As Ted Scott grew older he did all that he could to help his foster father and mother about the Bromville House. Things brightened up a bit when Ted obtained work in the aero plant.

Ted's work was not drudgery. He loved the making of airplanes. His secret ambition was to become a flyer, but that seemed for a time to be a hopeless dream. It would take hundreds of dollars to go to a flying school and he could not lay up a dollar. Besides, he would

have to count on the loss of his wages while he was learning to fly.

To the plant one morning came Walter Hapworth, a wealthy young business man and an expert golfer. He was at the time playing in a tournament on the Hotel Excelsior course, in which he owned an interest. Ted was assigned to show Hapworth about the aero plant. The latter was pleased by the promptness and accuracy which Ted showed in answering his many questions. Learning of the lad's ambition to become a flyer, he offered to provide the necessary funds to go to flying school and a sufficient sum besides to make up for his wages while away.

Shortly after that time the country was worked up by the offer of a purse of twenty-five thousand dollars to the aviator who should make the first non-stop air flight from New York to Paris.

Ted Scott, then in the air mail service, read of the contest and ardently desired to enter it. But he would require a plane and many thousand dollars for expenses, and he had no such resources. Here again his tried friend, Walter Hapworth, came to the rescue. He offered to build the plane and provide all other necessary funds. Ted went out to San Francisco to supervise the building of the plane, which he named the *Hapworth* after his benefactor.

How carefully Ted Scott prepared for the great venture, how in fog and sleet and storm he flew over the ocean wastes, reached Europe, and swooped down like a lone eagle on Paris, is told in the first volume of this series entitled: "Over the Ocean to Paris."

Shortly after his return came a great calamity in the Mississippi Valley. One of the greatest floods ever recorded swept over that fertile country. Thousands were rendered homeless by the disaster. Ted Scott enlisted at once in the aviation section of the Red Cross and displayed prodigies of courage in succoring the stricken people.

Later on, he went back to the mail service, going to the Rocky Mountain Division, the most perilous of all, and had many stirring adventures. Other adventures followed when he crossed the Pacific from California to Honolulu, beating all competitors and establishing an amazing record.

Not long afterward he made an air flight over the West Indies to rescue imperiled friends and incidentally recovered a vast amount of treasure in pearls. A little later he accompanied Walter Hapworth to Mexico where he helped his friend preserve his oil interests against confiscation. There he came near to ending his career when he fell into the hands of a bandit chief.

On his return to America he was instrumental in rounding up a gang of mail robbers at great personal risk. Once more he flew across the Pacific, this time to far away Australia, the trip being enlivened by the presence of a madman in the plane.

On his return he was persuaded by secret service men to coöperate with them in stopping diamond smuggling from Canada into the United States. How after the most thrilling adventures he succeeded in capturing the king of the smugglers is narrated in the preceding volume of this series entitled: "The Lone Eagle of the Border."

Now to return to Ted Scott as he views with bewilderment and rapidly rising wrath the approach of the enemies who, he had every reason to think, ought at that moment to be in jail serving the sentences that justice had imposed on them.

There was no love lost between Ted and the Gale twins. They were true sons of their father, Brewster Gale, and had inherited his meanest characteristics. Gregory and Duckworth Gale—Greg and Duck for short—were slightly older than Ted Scott and had always cherished a bitter hostility toward him for no reason but that Ted was popular in the town while they were almost universally disliked because of their low characters and dissipated

habits. Especially had they been bitter after Ted had achieved world-wide fame by his flight across the Atlantic. They had sought again and again to do him injury, but had always come out "at the little end of the horn." The climax had come when they had robbed Eben Browning and clubbed him into unconsciousness. Ted had captured them and they had been sent to prison.

Why were they not in prison now? This was Ted's unspoken question as he watched the pair come nearer.

That they, also, recognized him, was evident from the words hastily exchanged between them.

Ted, for his part, would have passed them quietly. They were jailbirds, outside the pale, but he had no desire to hit any one who was down. If they really had the desire to fight their way back into decent society, he would be the last one to hinder them.

But they would not have him pass. They stopped when within about five feet of him, and in their eyes was the venom of rattlesnakes.

"Ted Scott!" gritted Greg between his teeth. "Gee, how I hate the sight of you!"

CHAPTER III

Weaving a Web

Ted Scott looked coldly at Greg Gale as the latter delivered himself of his venomous statement.

"Still got the same sweet disposition you had when you went away, I see," he remarked. "I don't care to bandy words with you fellows. Get out of my way and let me pass."

"Not until I've had my say," returned Greg. "I want to tell you, Ted Scott, that I'm going to get even with you, if it's the last thing I do on earth."

"That goes for me too," snarled Duck. "Gee, how I'd like to drive your nose into your face!"

"Well, there's nothing to keep you from trying," replied Ted. "You've attempted to do it before, you know, and I've licked you both at the same time. I'm ready to repeat the dose, if you really insist on it."

"This isn't the time or the place for that," said Duck. "But don't think for a moment that

we won't be watching for our chance. And when it comes, be sure we'll take advantage of it."

"It's kind of you to warn me," drawled Ted. "That shows an improvement on your part. You didn't warn me when you tried to crush my head in with the rock you threw in the dark. You didn't warn me when you cut the strut of my plane, hoping that I'd crash to the earth, nor when you tried to run me down with your automobile. You didn't send advance notice when you tried to rob Eben Browning and knocked him out with a club. Yes, you've really improved, in warning me now. By the way, how does it happen that you fellows are out of prison?"

"None of your business," snapped Greg. "We're out, and that's enough. More than enough for you, as you'll find out to your cost."

"Now look here, you rats!" exclaimed Ted, dropping his light tone while a steely glint came into his eyes. "I've had enough of that kind of rot. I've tried to be patient because you've got a hard row to hoe from now on and I wouldn't do anything to make it harder. Get out of my way now or I'll give you both the thrashing of your lives. I've done it before and you know I can do it again."

Before his blazing eyes their own wavered and fell. They hastily scrambled to one side

and Ted passed on. They would have liked to fall on him from behind, but they were deterred by a lively recollection of the fists that had more than once before beaten them.

Ted's thoughts were busy as he resumed his interrupted walk to the Bromville House. His irritation soon vanished, but wonderment remained. How in the mischief had those fellows got out of prison? He knew that they had not served half of their terms.

"I met some old friends of ours to-day," he said, as he sat down to the table in the private dining room with Eben and Charity Browning.

"Land sakes!" exclaimed Charity. "Who were they? Why didn't you bring them home to dinner?"

"I didn't think you'd care especially to see them," replied Ted, grinning. "You aren't hankering, are you, for the company of Greg and Duck Gale?"

Eben gazed at Ted open-mouthed. Charity dropped her knife and fork with a clatter.

"You're joking!" Eben got out at last. "Those skunks are in jail!"

"Nary a joke," declared Ted. "And they're not in jail, though of course they ought to be. Met them on the street half an hour ago."

"The dirty scoundrels!" exclaimed Eben.

"There, there, Eben," said good old Charity. "Don't let us be too hard. Perhaps their stay

in jail has given them time to repent of their sins and they may be chastened now."

"Wasn't much sign of it," laughed Ted. "They stopped me and told me of all kinds of awful things they were going to do to me when they got a chance. I had to threaten them with a licking before I could get by."

"They're bad through and through," declared Eben.

"Do be careful, Ted," urged Charity. "You know they nearly killed you before and it was only the Lord's mercy that they didn't do it."

"I'm not likely to forget," replied Ted. "But each time I managed to come out on top. They haven't any real courage. They're yellow all through."

"But even a yellow dog can bite," warned Eben. "Keep your eyes open, my boy."

In the meantime, the subjects of this conversation had kept on their way to the Hotel Excelsior, where they were received by their father, who took them at once to his private room.

If there was any soft spot in Brewster Gale's heart it was that for his two sons, and he was deeply affected as he threw his arms about them when once they were alone.

Duck endured the embrace more or less ungraciously, but Greg drew away roughly and threw himself into a chair.

"I'm not in a hugging mood," he sneered. "Why didn't you get us out sooner? You've got money enough."

"I've done my best," replied his father. "Do you suppose I'd have left you there a minute longer than I had to? But it couldn't be done too soon. A good deal of feeling was stirred up by that Browning affair—"

"Browning!" snapped Greg viciously. "That's a name I hate only less than Scott."

"I have reason to do the same," replied his father. "Eben Browning has given me no end of trouble. As I was saying, it wouldn't have been good policy to have sought your release until feeling had died down and the people had partly forgotten it. As soon as I thought it advisable I began to feel my way. I put a lot of money where it would do the most good and got next to some politicians who had the ear of the governor. There were a good many hard spots to be got over, but I negotiated them and —here you are!"

"Yes, here we are, with the brand of jail-birds stamped all over us," growled Duck.

"I know it's hard," admitted his father. "But it can be lived down. My money will help. If after a while we find things are too hard to stand, I'll set you up in business somewhere where you can get a fresh start. I'll help you to anything you want."

"Anything we want?" asked Greg, showing his teeth in an evil smile.

"Anything," repeated his father.

Greg and Duck looked at each other, the same thought in their minds.

"Call his bluff, Greg," counseled Duck.

"I will," said Greg. He turned to his father. "Help us get even with Ted Scott."

"Ted Scott!" exclaimed Brewster Gale, a scowl coming on his forehead at the mention of that hated name. "What put him in your minds just now?"

"He's never been out of our minds," replied Greg. "Day and night while we've been in jail we've thought of nothing else. If wishes could hurt, he'd have been hurt long ago."

"Right you are," echoed Duck. "And we told him as much a few minutes ago. First fellow we met as we were coming from the station."

"What did he say to you?" asked Gale.

"It's what we said to him that counts," replied Greg. "You can bet we told him plenty. Came near licking him right then and there."

"You want to be careful," counseled his father. "What's the use of threatening him when that only puts him on his guard?"

"I believe you're afraid of him," sneered Greg.

"Afraid!" snorted Brewster Gale, jumping

to his feet and beginning to pace the floor. All the temporary softness aroused by his paternal feeling had vanished and he was the same crafty, scheming, wicked old man as of yore.

"Afraid!" he repeated, as the stopped in front of the chairs in which his sons were sprawled. "Yes, I am afraid. Afraid not of him but his luck. For years past he's been an obstacle in my path. He's thwarted me at every turn.

"Who was it," he fairly spat out, as his anger gained on him, "that made me refund thousands of dollars to that old fool that keeps the Bromville House? Ted Scott. Who was it that made me shell out other thousands to Hapworth and Monet when he got next to that golf course affair? Ted Scott. Who was it that nabbed you fellows in Porto Rico and handed you over to the police? Ted Scott.

"And here's another thing. While you were away there was an endurance contest right in this town. Ted Scott, of course, was in it. Equally of course he won it. I had the thing all sewed up with Hardwick. Thought I had a cinch and bet my head off. But that infernal luck of Scott's still stood by him and he circumvented Hardwick and won the contest. He gave Hardwick a fearful licking and I was nicked to the tune of five thousand dollars.

"Do you wonder that I'm superstitious about him? Always and everywhere he's got the best of me. That's why I say that while I'm not afraid of Ted Scott I'm afraid of his astounding luck."

"That luck can't last always," put in Duck morosely. "Sooner or later he'll have a tumble."

"It'll be the happiest day of my life when that tumble comes," declared Brewster Gale venomously. "How I hate him!"

"Seems to be unanimous," muttered Greg. "Strange with all of us feeling the same way, we can't down him. What's his next stunt? Anything special on hand?"

"Yes, something that was cooked up only today," replied his father. "Going to try a coast to coast flight in twenty hours. Big money in it, too. He's made a private bet of ten thousand dollars that he could do it, and Hapworth and Monet have put up fifteen thousand apiece that he'll turn the trick."

Greg gave a prolonged whistle.

"Forty thousand dollars in all!" he exclaimed. "You're right when you say that's big money. Gee, how I'd like to see him lose his bet!"

"And Hapworth and Monet too," assented his father, who could not forget how he had

been compelled to pay those gentlemen their rightful dues when his swindling in the matter of the golf course had been exposed.

"Sounds as if there might be something in that to suit our book," murmured Duck. "What are the conditions of this race against time?"

"Pretty tough ones," replied Gale. "He's got to start within a given time despite weather conditions. And it's play or pay. If he should fall sick or have an accident so that he couldn't start, he'd lose his bet just the same."

Greg and Duck exchanged hopeful glances.

"If an accident should happen!" murmured Duck.

"If an accident should happen!" repeated Greg.

CHAPTER IV

A Sinister Suggestion

Brewster Gale started as he sensed the significance of the looks and words of his sons.

If at first he seemed about to protest, he thought better of it and ruminated thoughtfully, the evil scowl deepening on his brow.

"We'll fix him," declared Greg.

"He'll never win that wad," added Duck.

"How about it?" Greg asked his father. "Are you in with us on this?"

"What have you got in mind?" asked his father, but with no shadow of reproof in his tone.

"Nothing definite as yet," replied Greg. "It just occurred to us how frequent accidents are in this world. No one knows when something is going to happen to him. If his auto goes wrong, he may be flung against a tree and break his arm. If he's walking down the street, a branch may fall on his head. If any weakness develops in his plane, he may fall to the

ground. In the dark he might trip over something. Life is full of uncertainties."

"Sure thing," agreed Duck. "And Ted Scott is just as likely as any one else to have an accident happen to him. Of course, if he did, we'd all shed bitter tears, but it couldn't be helped. All we could do would be to send flowers to the hospital."

Brewster Gale said nothing. He chewed savagely on the end of his cigar.

"You don't seem to be very enthusiastic about these possibilities," Greg said to his father. "You didn't use to be so squeamish."

"It's simply that I'm doubtful of the rough stuff," replied Gale. "Let an accident happen to Ted Scott and it would be in the next edition of every paper in the country. In no time the place would be swarming with reporters and they'd examine the cause of that accident with a microscope. If this accident, as you call it, should occur, it would have to be very cleverly managed."

"Don't you think we're clever enough?" asked Greg truculently.

"No, I don't, to tell the truth," answered Brewster Gale shortly. "He's put it all over you every time you've run up against him."

"That's good, coming from you," declared Duck angrily. "I don't see you wearing any medals from your encounters with Ted Scott.

He's licked you to a frazzle. You admitted it yourself."

"There, there, don't let's quarrel," put in Brewster Gale hastily. "Let's bring all our guns to bear on Ted Scott instead of on each other. Just at this minute an idea has popped into my head that may be worth something. Draw your chairs closer and I'll tell you what it is."

The news of the proposed contest spread and was printed in the local paper the next morning. The big press associations were quick to see the news value of it and telegraphed it to every great newspaper in the country. It caught the imagination of the nation, and for the next few days it was an almost universal subject of animated discussion.

Opinion was divided as to the possibility of the feat being performed. Of course, the fact that Ted Scott was the one to attempt it inclined most people to consider it as good as done. They had seen him try so many difficult things and always come through with flying colors that they refused to entertain the idea of failure.

There were others, however, who viewed the matter more dispassionately and pointed out the almost insuperable obstacles that Ted would have to overcome, if he were to win.

The weather was one, the failure of the plane another, the distance to go and the great average speed that would have to be maintained were others. If he failed to conquer a single one of these, he was lost.

On one point there was universal agreement. That was that the conditions were too hard and the bet unsportsmanlike on the part of Ferdinand Sipp and his friends as regards sickness or disability. It was pointed out that, if such should prove to be the case, the bet ought either to be called off or the contest deferred until Ted recovered.

Much graver still was an angle of the case brought to attention by an editorial in a large New York daily. Walter Hapworth discovered it and brought it to Ted.

"Read that, Ted," he said, pointing to a paragraph of the article in question.

That special paragraph read as follows:

"Not only is the stipulation regarding sickness or disability unfair, but it is positively dangerous. It places a premium on violence. It is a direct incentive to bring about deliberately that sickness or disability that would lose the race for Scott.

"We do not intimate for a moment that such a thought would be cherished by the gentlemen who made the bet. They are men of the highest

standing and wholly beyond suspicion. But it must be remembered that the interest engendered by the race will make it a big betting event. Thousands will back their judgment with their money and excitement will run high.

"If this were confined to individual bets, it would not greatly matter. But suppose a ring of professional gamblers should raise a pool of several hundred thousand dollars and bet against Scott? They could easily find takers. Then suppose—and the supposition is not incredible to those who know the habits of these gentry—the gamblers should decide to make sure of winning by simply putting Scott out of the running!

"We advise Ted Scott to be extremely careful, and we earnestly hope that the wager may be so far amended as to exclude this obnoxious feature."

Ted dropped the paper and stared at Walter.

"I never thought of that!" he exclaimed.

"I didn't either," admitted Walter. "You can be sure that if I had I would have kicked at that clause. I think I'd better see Sipp and the other fellows and try to get it taken out."

Ted pondered for a moment.

"I don't think I would," he said. "I've never backed out of a contract yet and I'm not going to begin. They'd think I was getting

cold feet, pleading the baby act. If I had any kick coming, I ought to have registered it before it was put down in black and white. But I didn't, so I'm going to stand by it."

"That's all right as a general thing," said Walter. "But this is a matter that may affect your health or even your life."

"Yes, that at least is possible," agreed Ted. "All the same, I'm going to stand pat. That is, as far as my own personal bet is concerned. Of course, you and Paul are in this, too, and I don't want to interfere with anything you may feel your own interests require."

"We'll stand by you," was the reply. "If Sipp and his crowd are real sports, they'll propose that of their own accord. If they don't, they won't hear a peep out of us. All the same, old boy, I can't help being worried for your safety."

"That's mighty good of you, Walter," said Ted warmly. "But don't let it worry you too much. I'm going to pull through this thing all right. Most of my enemies—Felwig, Hardwick, Kost and the rest—are in jail anyway," he added, with a laugh.

"You're forgetting a couple that were in jail but are there no longer," remarked Walter Hapworth significantly.

"Oh, you mean Greg and Duck Gale!"

"And Brewster Gale himself. He's as bad

as either of those sons of his—worse if anything."

"I'll be on the watch," promised Ted. "Come along with me now over to the Aero plant. I've got to get started on that new plane of mine as soon as possible and I want your advice."

"You've made up your mind then that the *Browning* won't do?" asked Hapworth.

"Not for a test like that," returned Ted. "She's a dandy old girl for most things, but she hasn't the speed. She was never designed to make two hundred miles an hour. Of course it will be only on rare occasions that I'd ask the plane to do that, but I want her to be able to when I call on her."

"I thought that perhaps you might put an extra motor in her and get enough additional speed that way."

"No," replied Ted, "everything about her is built in harmony with the speed she was originally designed to make, about a hundred and twenty-five an hour. The whole plane would be thrown out of balance if I installed an additional motor. I think I'd better have an entirely new plane from stem to stern."

"You've got mighty little time to do it in," observed Walter Hapworth doubtfully.

"I know it," replied Ted. "I'd far rather have three months than six weeks. But they've promised over at the plant to put two shifts,

and if necessary three, on her so that I'll be sure to have it in time."

They left the hotel and went over to the plant, where, for the greater part of the day, they discussed plans and pored over blueprints in company with the most skilled engineers and mechanics of the firm.

Walter Hapworth left first to fulfil an engagement, but it was quitting time when Ted left the works. The men were pouring out, and Ted found himself the center of a group comprising his closest friends and old associates.

"No keeping a squirrel on the ground, old boy," said Mark Lawson, as he clapped Ted on the shoulder. "I see you're in another contest. How many honors do you intend to cop, anyway? Aren't you ever going to be satisfied?"

"Why should I be?" laughed Ted. "The man who is completely satisfied is dead—from the neck up, at any rate."

"Looks to me as though this were the toughest job you ever tackled," put in Breck Lewis.

"Most jug-handled thing I ever saw," remarked Bill Ellison. "If it were any one else than Ted, I should say they're asking him to do a thing that's impossible."

"The word impossible isn't in Ted's dictionary," laughed Mark. "Go to it, old boy. We'll all be rooting for you."

"Thanks," said Ted. "I guess I'll need all

the rooting I can get. I've got my work cut out for me."

"You'll make it, all right," declared Breck confidently. "I'm the seventh son of a seventh son and my gift of prophecy is working overtime."

"We're going to make up a pool among us and put it on you, Ted, at any odds we can get," declared Jack.

"And we'll put every cent we can beg, borrow, or steal into it," added Mark.

"I'm flattered by your confidence," replied Ted. "All the same, you're taking risks. A hundred things may happen to prevent my winning."

"We're not worrying," said Mark. "I'm already figuring on how I'll spend my winnings."

"I know two fellows who won't be betting on Ted," remarked Breck, pointing to a pair that were passing along the adjoining street.

"Greg and Duck Gale," laughed Mark, as he recognized them. "No, it's perfectly certain they won't be putting any money on their dear friend, Ted Scott."

"I thought perhaps they'd learned their lesson," observed Jack. "But they're the same rotten pair they used to be and are loafing about as before in the lowest joints in town."

"That's too bad," said Ted regretfully. "I

had hoped they'd turn over a new leaf. They've always done all they could to injure me, but I haven't any malice against them."

"Well, they've got plenty against you," observed Mark. "Do you know what I heard they were saying the other night?"

"What were they saying?" asked Ted.

"That there was going to be the biggest funeral Bromville had ever seen," replied Mark, "and that Ted Scott was going to play the part of the corpse."

"Really?" laughed Ted. "Now, that's interesting. I've no ambition to play that part. Of course they were fooling when they said it."

"Likely enough," agreed Mark. "But it's when men are fooling that they're apt to give away their secret thoughts and hopes."

"Well, threatened men live long," stated Ted, "and I guess I'll prove the truth of that proverb."

"Let's hope so," replied Mark. "All the same, Ted, you want to sleep with one eye open. I wouldn't put anything past that pair of skunks."

CHAPTER V

A Narrow Escape

Ted Scott was of the same opinion as his friends regarding the Gale twins, but he soon found himself so engrossed with work that the thought of the Gales was relegated to the back of his mind. It was a mammoth task that had been set him in getting his plane ready in the limited time assigned to him. Even after the plane should be finished, the tests he would put it to might reveal structural defects that had been overlooked in its building.

So he worked hard and studied hard, often till far into the night, mastering every new development that might promote the speed, safety, and buoyancy of the plane that was destined to carry him and his fortunes.

"What's that?" asked Walter Hapworth curiously one day, as he came upon Ted studying a new invention.

"A magneto compass," replied Ted. "As far as I've looked into it it's a peach."

"What's the matter with the old earth in-

ductor compass? That's done pretty well so far. It didn't go back on you when you crossed the Atlantic and the Pacific, even when you made that last big hop to Australia."

"That was good," conceded Ted. "But there's nothing so good but that something else may be discovered that is better. And I think that's true in this case. In the first place, this weighs only about one fifth as much as the earth inductor, and that means saving half a horsepower of the airplane engine."

"That's certainly worth saving," agreed Walter, "especially in a race against time like this, where every ounce of weight counts. Where do you install it?"

"It's mounted in the tail of the plane," explained Ted, "so as to be away from the magnetic influence of the engine and other steel and iron parts. The rotating armature is driven by a small propeller."

"What's the principle on which it works?"

"It's like this. A magnetron or rotating coil of wire is placed in a cavity within the bar and the bar is maintained in a position perpendicular to the vertical component of the earth's magnetic field by means of a pendulum. Any deviation of the ship from its course results in a magnetic flux within the bar. The direction and magnitude of this variation are indicated electrically."

"Clever," commented Walter Hapworth. "Have you stumbled across any other new wrinkles?"

"I am glad to tell you," replied Ted, "that I've run across an instrument that will measure absolute altitude."

"I thought you had that already!"

"No," replied Ted, "the barometric altimeter now in use measures only relative altitudes and it is altered by changing weather conditions. This new thing is the first depth-finding device that will show you actually how much thin air is between you and the ground. You know what the radio squeal is, don't you?"

"Sure! I've heard it often enough when I've been in the vicinity of some one who was trying to overwork a regenerative receiver."

"Well, this inventor has now turned that nuisance into a benefit," explained Ted. "He found out that every time the airplane changed altitude by half a wave length the distinctive whistling note of the oscillating receiver went through a complete tone cycle from a low pitch to a high pitch and back again to low. By counting the cycles of the tone he found it easy to determine his altitude, the measuring stick being one-half the wave length of the antenna oscillator. He developed a graph by means of which measurements were made up to four thousand feet, the amplitude of the wave line

giving immediate indication of the height over the ground."

Walter Hapworth sighed.

"Sounds all right," he said. "If I knew more of radio I'd understand it better."

"It is all right!" exclaimed Ted enthusiastically. "Think what it will be to me, especially when flying over the Rockies, to know almost to a foot how much space is between me and the ground. It will enable me to avoid collisions with mountain peaks, the tops of trees, church steeples and the like when visibility is poor. Why, with that I could almost land in a fog! I tell you, Walter, that after a while we shall be as safe in an airplane as we are now in an automobile."

"Go to it, my boy," said Walter Hapworth. "With the task you have before you you'll need every device that will add to safety."

While Ted Scott was thus engaged in preparing for the supreme test, interest in the great race against time was spreading over the country. The newspapers gave columns to it and every feature of it was discussed pro and con.

Under these conditions it was natural that betting should become general. Wherever men discussed the subject there would be opposing opinions and men would offer to back their opinions with wagers large or small.

This was inevitable. But what Ted hated was to see professional gamblers take the matter up. That took it out of the realm of pure sport and got it on to a commercial basis. Now, as Ted scanned the papers, he read almost every day of pools being formed and books being made by professionals in the large cities.

Still there was nothing that he could do about it and he dismissed the matter as far as possible from his thoughts.

A small office had been set aside for his use in the Aero plant, and there he often worked far into the night. He would often become so absorbed in his work that he would forget all about his supper.

Sometimes he would become conscious of a certain craving and would wake to the consciousness that he had eaten nothing since noon.

Some would have found solace for that craving in a pipe or a cigar. But Ted never smoked. He found a substitute for this in chewing gum. He had found this valuable in flying, as it kept his mouth and throat moist when, as sometimes happened, he ran short of water, and when he was hungry it materially abated his desire for food. Too, in some way it made time seem shorter when he was on a long journey. So it was seldom that he was without a package of gum in his pocket.

One night when he had been delayed at the office by an especially engrossing problem, he locked the door and started for home. The night was dark, with no moon, and it was so late that scarcely any one was abroad.

He was passing a new brick building that was being constructed on a side street when there was a sudden crash and something fell heavily at his feet. It was so close that he could feel the wind of it as it passed, and splinters from the shattered object sprang up and stung his face.

He started back involuntarily. Then he stopped and picked up the object at his feet. Objects, rather, for he found in his hand the two parts of a brick that had been broken in half by the fall.

"That was a close shave," he muttered to himself. "Missed me by no more than a foot. Probably killed me if it had come down on the top of my head. Now what in thunder made that fall?"

Was it the rumble of a train that had dislodged the brick, left, possibly, by a careless mason too near the edge of the scaffold? But there was no train passing just then.

Was it the wind? There was no wind.

Ted made his way in to the ground floor of the building that had a rough flooring covering the beams, took out his flashlight and sent it

sweeping into every nook and corner. Nobody was there.

Then he climbed a ladder to the second floor and made another fruitless search. His quest on the third floor, the highest point the building had reached, was equally vain.

He stood still and listened. No sound anywhere. Everything was as still as the grave.

CHAPTER VI

Nearly a Smash

What made that brick fall from the scaffold? Or had it fallen? Had it not been thrown or dropped by human hands?

These were the questions that were perturbing Ted Scott's mind as he stood listening in the partly constructed building. But they were questions to which nothing he could see or hear gave any answer.

He went to the rear of the building and peered about with the aid of a flashlight. Its side bordered an alley that ran through from one street to another.

Had any one been on that scaffold, he might have clambered down and made his way to the back street and thus escaped detection.

Yet, it seemed almost incredible to Ted that such scrambling should not have been heard by him. The night was quiet and every sound carried to a long distance.

He went through to the back street, with the thought that some one might be lurking in the

shadows there, waiting to see the result of the attempt, if indeed it had been a deliberate attempt.

His foot jarred against something light that yielded to his push and slid several feet away.

He stooped and picked it up, examining it with the aid of his flashlight. It was a package of cigarettes of an imported British brand, quite celebrated and rather expensive. About two-thirds of the usual number of cigarettes remained in the package.

It looked to Ted as though the package might have dropped from the pocket of some one fleeing in haste, whose coat had knocked against and been momentarily held by some obstruction.

There was nothing about it that differed from probably a million other packages of the same brand, but Ted slipped it into his pocket on the mere chance that it might some time be found useful.

He looked carefully for any slip of paper that might have been pulled at the same time from the owner's pocket. But his search was fruitless, and at length he returned to the other street and resumed his journey to the Bromville House.

He said nothing about the matter to Eben and Charity. But it was a very sober and thoughtful Ted Scott who tossed upon his pil-

lows long that night before sleep came to him.

The next morning he dropped into a tobacco store kept by a friend of his.

"Hello, Sam," he greeted the owner.

"How are you, Ted," replied Bill. "What in thunder brought you into this store?" he demanded. "Is it possible that you have taken up smoking?"

"Not yet," laughed Ted. "I dropped in for a moment because I wanted to ask you a question."

"Out with it."

Ted pulled the package of cigarettes out of his pocket and laid it on the counter.

"Do you keep this brand in stock?" he asked.

Sam glanced at the brand.

"No," he said. "It's too classy for the general run of my customers. It costs twice as much as the ordinary kind."

"Ever have any inquiries for it?" continued Ted, anxiously.

"Oh, once in a dog's age," replied Sam. "Once in a while a traveling man gets gay with his firm's money and spreads himself. But it's months since any one has asked for it. Why the sudden interest in the vile weed?"

"Oh, just a matter of a little personal interest," evaded Ted. "Do any of the other tobacco stores in town carry this special brand?"

"I don't think so," replied Sam. "But it won't do any harm to ask."

Ted made the rounds, but with no success. Bromville stuck to the ordinary brands.

When he saw Walter Hapworth that day he told him of the occurrence of the night before. The latter looked very grave.

"Beginning already, are they?" he said. "Do be careful, Ted. Keep off the streets at night or, if you have to go out, have somebody with you."

"Of course, this might have been an accident," suggested Ted.

"Accident nothing!" snorted Walter. "Of course, a brick may fall from a building, if it's left teetering on the edge of a scaffold by a careless workman. I suppose it has happened sometimes. But that it should fall at the very instant you're passing beneath it is stretching the long arm of coincidence too far. No, take my word for it, that brick was either dropped or thrown. Did you say that you have no clue at all to who did it?"

"Not unless you call this a clue," replied Ted, throwing the package of cigarettes on the desk.

Walter Hapworth examined it carefully.

"Finest brand that's made," he commented. "I don't suppose there's any place in town you could get it except at the Hotel Excelsior."

Ted sat up in his chair with a jerk.

"Do they sell it?" he asked.

"Sure thing," was the reply. "You know their patrons want the best, regardless of expense."

"The Hotel Excelsior!" Ted repeated. "And that hotel is kept by Brewster Gale."

There was a moment's silence while Ted Scott and Walter Hapworth looked hard and long at each other.

"Of course Greg and Duck get the best their father has in stock," remarked Ted.

"Sure thing! Nothing is too good for papa's darlings. Ted, I believe you've hit the nail on the head. That package of cigarettes belongs to either Greg or Duck Gale and was lost as one or the other or both were hurrying away from the place."

"Looks possible," said Ted thoughtfully. "Of course, nobody else living at the hotel could have done it."

"Utterly out of the question. Ted, those fellows are out to get you."

"Well, they didn't get me," said Ted Scott, with a wry smile. "They have terribly hard luck with their schemes."

"Their luck may suddenly turn," warned Hapworth. "Don't you relax one jot of vigilance, old boy."

"I won't," promised Ted. "After this when

I'm passing a new building it's me for the middle of the street."

"They won't repeat," said Hapworth. "The next attack will come in a different form. I wish I'd never got you into this contest!"

"Forget it," said Ted. "I got into it myself. Put your troubles in your old kit bag, Walter, and smile, smile, smile. All these fellows' bullets have proved blank cartridges so far, and I have a hunch that that's all they'll ever amount to."

"I wish I were as optimistic," sighed Walter Hapworth.

The next week was an extremely busy one and a delightful one for Ted Scott as he saw his new plane taking form. He was getting the fullest coöperation from every one in the works and he could see already that the new machine would exceed in buoyancy, speed and stability any that he had ever before possessed.

Only one diversion did he permit himself. Every day after the noon meal he took the *Browning* up for a spin. The elation he felt when once in the air seemed to clear the cobwebs from his brain, and after he reached the ground again he pitched into his work with renewed energy.

One day after dinner he returned to the works and spent a half hour on a special bit of planning that deferred his aerial trip till a lit-

tle later than usual. The day had been very warm and he had carried his coat over his arm on his return from the Bromville House to the Aero plant. He hung this on a nail in the hangar in which the *Browning* was stored and went into the main building.

When he emerged Jackson, his mechanic, was filling the tanks of the *Browning* with gasoline.

"Any one been around, Jackson?" asked Ted, for the interest aroused by the coming contest brought many curious ones to the flying field, who hung around chiefly on the chance of getting a glimpse of Ted.

"Not so many," replied Jackson, as he closed the tank. "Mostly town people, including those pesky Gale brats. Pity those loafers can't find something to do except breathe!"

"Keep your eyes on those fellows, Jackson," warned Ted, "and if they give you the least excuse for doing it, order them off the field."

"I'll do that," promised Jackson. "It gives me the willies just to look at their ugly mugs. Whoever let those fellows out of prison made a big mistake."

"I think so myself," observed Ted, as he drew on his coat, took a stick of gum from his pocket and bit off a piece. "Well, I'm off now, Jackson. Be back in an hour or less. Knock

away those blocks and give the propeller a whirl, will you?"

Jackson complied, the *Browning* roared down the runway and soared into the air like a bird.

"Good old girl," murmured Ted caressingly to his plane. "I hate like the mischief to leave you behind when I start on that coast to coast trip. I sure would like to have you hear the roaring of the waves of the Pacific. But I've got to have speed, old girl, speed to burn. And when it comes to a possible two hundred miles an hour, you don't quite make the grade."

The machine worked to a charm, obeying the slightest movement of the controls, the weather was fine and there was no reason apparent why Ted Scott should not enjoy the airing as much as he had expected to. As a matter of fact, he did for the first ten minutes.

Then gradually he felt a strange sort of lethargy gaining on him. He found himself acting mechanically. His hands were sluggish as they manipulated the stick. There was a ringing in his ears.

"What's the matter with me?" he asked himself impatiently. "Could I have eaten anything at dinner that disagreed with me?"

He tried to shake off the feeling, but it persisted. A dull ache was invading his head. His eyes were swimming. The landmarks below,

that a few minutes before had been perfectly plain, now seemed zigzag and distorted.

A bit alarmed, he turned the nose of his plane toward home. It was high time that he did so, for his head was reeling and the faintness was becoming more pronounced.

"Strange," he muttered thickly. "I've never felt this way before."

But hadn't he? Yes, just once! The memory came back to him of the time he had been doped when his plane had been robbed.

Doped! Sinister word! Was he doped now?

Startled now, he made a great effort, gave the *Browning* all the gas it could use, and sped for the home flying field.

He fought desperately against the lethargy that was invading him. He must keep his senses.

Through a thick haze he saw the Aero plant beneath him. He made a quick descent. It was far from the graceful, swanlike landing that was characteristic of his work.

The plane struck the ground with a heavy jar, ran along unsteadily a few hundred feet and stopped.

But just when it stopped Ted did not know. He was dead to the world!

CHAPTER VII

Villainy

Ted Scott roused himself with the feeling that a pile driver was pounding him and that a cataract was roaring in his ears. As his scattered senses reassembled themselves he realized that Jackson was shaking him and shouting at him.

"What's matter?" he murmured drowsily.

"Thank goodness!" Jackson's voice seemed to come from a long distance away. "I was afraid you were gone. Wake up, Ted. For the love of Pete, wake up!"

Ted straightened in the seat where he had slumped. He looked about him dazedly.

"We're on the ground, are we?" he asked sleepily.

"Yes, but you came within an ace of smashing," replied Jackson. "One of the wheels is broken. I never saw you come down that way before."

"Lucky I got down at all," replied Ted, whose senses were now clearing. "I don't

know what came over me, Jackson. A sort of deadly faintness. I thought I'd never make it."

"Hadn't I better run and get a doctor?" asked Jackson anxiously.

"No, don't do that! I don't want to make talk. There's more in this than meets the eye, Jackson. Just keep the whole matter quiet. Break out that medicine kit of mine and mix up a stiff dose of spirits of ammonia with water. I guess that will fix me all right."

Jackson did as requested and the draft did wonders in clearing Ted's dizzy brain.

"Has any one besides yourself noticed this, Jackson?" he asked.

"No. The field happens to be clear. The afternoon bunch hasn't begun to come yet."

"Good! Keep the whole thing absolutely quiet, Jackson. Just go about your work as though nothing had happened and leave me here a little while to rest."

"Just as you say," conceded Jackson reluctantly. "But I still wish you'd let me get a doctor, or at the very least let me see you home."

"No," said Ted. "The folks would be scared to death. A few minutes rest will fix me up."

Jackson departed and Ted, left alone, tried to pull himself together.

What had caused this amazing thing? He was in the pink of condition, had never felt bet-

ter in his life than when he had started to go up that afternoon. Yet he had scarcely got into the skies before that queer feeling had begun to steal in upon him.

Could it have been a touch of acute indigestion? But that would have been accompanied with pain. He had not had cramps. He had eaten moderately at noon and taken his time.

Was it anything he had drunk? He had had only coffee, prepared by Charity's own hand.

No, these suppositions must be dismissed.

Yet something was responsible. There could be no effect without a cause. Just what had done it?

He cudgeled his brain but could find no solution.

There was a queer taste in his mouth. He thought at first that it was that of the spirits of ammonia he had taken. But it was different from that, a sort of acrid, sickly sweet flavor that persisted.

It was unpleasant, and to get rid of it he took out his package of chewing gum, hoping that a little nibbling at that would destroy the taste.

As he lifted the gum to his lips he was struck by the fact that it had the same queer odor that he was trying to drive away. He could not remember that the gum he was accustomed to had ever smelled that way before.

He examined the wrapper closely. It seemed

to be the usual one. But the flavor of the contents was undeniably different.

He sat, as rigid as a statue, staring at the package.

From that same package he had taken the piece of gum that he was chewing when he started on his trip. He remembered that he had got rid of that after the first few minutes because it did not give him the satisfaction it usually did.

Had that gum been doped? If so, by whom?

Carefully, very carefully, he rewrapped the package and put it back into his pocket. As he did so, he felt a little round thing that he could not identify.

He pulled it out and found it was a cigarette.

A cigarette! And yet he never smoked. A moment's glance showed him that it was of the same brand as the package he had picked up near the new building, the same package that was now reposing snugly in his desk at home.

He leaned out of the cockpit and called to the mechanic.

"I say, Jackson, come here a minute, will you?" he said.

Jackson came at once.

"When those Gale fellows were here a little while ago, did you notice whether they were smoking?" asked Ted.

The mechanic pondered for a moment.

"I think so," he said slowly. "They usually have a cigarette stuck in their faces. But no," he added, "now I come to think of it, only one of them, Duck, was really smoking. Greg had one in his hand, but he hadn't lighted it yet. What about it, anyway?"

"Nothing," evaded Ted. "I just wanted to know. That's all, Jackson. Sorry to have bothered you."

He leaned back in his seat and tried to figure it out. He thought he saw it all clearly now.

His coat had been hanging within easy reach of the pair. It would have been the simplest thing in the world when Jackson's back was turned for Greg to sidle up to the coat, abstract Ted's regular package of gum and substitute the doctored one in its stead. Naturally, he would do this in haste, and the cigarette he had in his hand might have been dropped in with the package.

Ted's fists clenched and his lips drew together in a straight line.

When his dizziness had entirely passed away and he felt more like himself again, he climbed out of the *Browning* and went into the works, where he spent the rest of his afternoon as usual looking after the construction of his new plane. He did not want any deviation from his usual habits that might attract remark.

That evening after supper he made his way

to the office of Dr. Meredith, the family physician of the Brownings.

To his regret he learned that the doctor was out on a special case and might not be home till late. But Ted determined to wait. The business on which he had come could not be deferred. He wanted certainty instead of conjecture.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when the doctor returned. He greeted Ted cordially, for there was no one in Bromville that the doctor had a higher regard and admiration for than the young aviator.

"Sorry not to have been here when you came, Ted," he said. "Hope you haven't been waiting long."

"Quite a while," replied Ted. "But I felt I had to see you."

"Anything the matter at home?" asked the doctor quickly. "Eben? Charity? I know it isn't yourself, for you're the picture of health. If everybody was as confoundedly healthy as you, we doctors would starve to death," he went on, smiling.

"No," replied Ted, smiling in return. "The folks are all right and so am I. It isn't a medical case but possibly a crime that I want to talk to you about."

The doctor's genial face became grave.

"That sounds serious," he said. "Tell me what you mean."

In return Ted told him of the events of the afternoon and produced the package of gum.

The doctor looked at it and smelled it.

"Not so good," he pronounced. "I think I recognize the odor. But I'll take it into the laboratory and test it."

It was twenty minutes before he returned.

"As I suspected," he said soberly. The gum has been doped. It's impregnated with a drug that produces unconsciousness in a few minutes. It's a wonder that you held out as long as you did against it. It was only the superb resistance of your healthy body that helped you."

"Luck surely was with me," replied Ted. "Thank you, doctor. I'll keep this package for possible evidence later."

"This ought to mean state's prison for somebody," fumed the doctor. "Have you any suspicions as to the miscreant that did it?"

"I have some suspicions," replied the young aviator, who had carefully avoided mentioning names. "But I don't want to do anybody an injustice. It may all come out sometime."

"And in the meantime you may be killed," stormed the doctor. "If you have any evidence at all, you ought to go right now to the district attorney and put the matter in his hands."

"Not yet," objected Ted. "A moral certainty isn't legal proof, and I haven't any evidence yet that would be conclusive."

"Well, take mighty good care of yourself, anyway," counseled Doctor Meredith. "The fellow who did this thing wouldn't stop at anything. I shan't feel easy until he is locked up."

CHAPTER VIII

A Lively Scrap

Ted Scott was in a white rage when he left the doctor's office. It would have gone hard with Greg and Duck Gale if he had come across them at that moment.

Why did these scoundrels so persistently dog his steps? He had always been content to mind his own business and let them alone. All the aggression had come from their side.

What had they not done? That cut strut in his machine! That rock that had come whizzing by his head in the dark! The attempt to run him down in their car! And what they had done to those who were far dearer to him than himself, the cowardly attack on the gray hairs of Eben and Charity Browning.

But that was in the past. He had hoped that the chapter had been closed when the scoundrels were safely lodged in prison. Yet here they were out again, unchastened by adversity and up to their old tricks.

Ted had not the slightest doubt but that they

had dropped the brick that might have seriously injured him. That they were responsible for the plane incident of that very afternoon he also felt absolutely certain.

He was in a ferment of wrath as he passed a low poolroom frequented by the riffraff of Bromville.

It was near closing time. Just as he came abreast of it, the swinging door was pushed open and a couple of men came out with unsteady steps and moved away.

But in that momentary swing of the door Ted had caught a glimpse of three figures within seated at a table playing cards. One of them he recognized as Wellman, the proprietor of the resort. The other two were Greg and Duck Gale.

On the spur of the moment, Ted stepped inside. He went in with an abruptness and determination that rather startled the trio, who rose from the table and looked at him uncertainly.

"Good evening, Mr. Scott," said Wellman, rubbing his hands and smiling ingratiatingly. "This is an unusual pleasure. Won't you sit down and join us in a little game?"

"No, thanks," said Ted shortly. "No offense to you, Wellman, but I don't care to play with jailbirds."

The Gales flushed angrily.

"Look out what you say, Ted Scott!" cried Duck.

"That's fighting talk!" exclaimed Greg huskily.

"I mean it to be," retorted Ted.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," implored Wellman, dancing about them in a frenzy of excitement. "Please, please, don't make any trouble. There's some little misunderstanding. Why not sit down and talk the matter over?"

"There's no misunderstanding," declared Ted. "I understand these curs only too well. They've been trying to do me up ever since they got back to Bromville."

Greg and Duck looked at each other in consternation. Greg licked his dry lips.

"It isn't true," Greg got out with difficulty.

"It's the truth," stated Ted. He produced the package of doctored gum from his pocket. "Here's the doped gum you slipped into my coat this afternoon, and here's the cigarette you dropped by mistake."

Greg snatched at the gum, but Ted was too quick for him.

"No you don't," he said. "Like to destroy the evidence, would you? Well, you can't."

He turned quickly to a coat hanging on a peg, thrust his hand into the pocket and pulled out a partially used package of gum. He smelled it. It was the harmless kind he commonly used.

"Just three pieces left," he commented. "I remember now that I had used two of the sticks. This is what you took out of my pocket when you substituted the doped package, you rat."

Greg made a grab at a heavy billiard cue lying on a near-by table. He never reached it. Ted's fist shot out and caught Greg flush on the jaw, knocking him to the floor.

The young aviator turned just in time to avoid a rush from Duck. As Ted dodged his swing, Duck overbalanced himself and fell to the floor.

"I'll get you for this," screamed Greg, starting to rise.

"Come ahead," challenged Ted. "I'm just beginning to fight."

This was so evidently true that Greg remained on one knee, nursing his jaw. Duck in the meantime had got to his feet, but before hostilities could go any further Wellman intervened.

"Please, don't keep this up, Mr. Scott," he begged. "I'm liable to have my license revoked if there's any trouble in my place. I've always tried to run my business quietly. Can't you settle this some other time and place? Please!"

There was a certain justice in this and Ted Scott acknowledged the force of it, though he acceded with reluctance.

Greg, now that the danger of a fight was over, became more belligerent.

"Don't think you've heard the last of this, Ted Scott," he cried. "I'll pay you for this deed yet."

"Come around and settle the debt any time," replied Ted cheerfully. "But I want you fellows to know that I'm on to you. The next attempt you make against me you'll be sorry for. Sorry to have made a rumpus in your place, Wellman," he added, turning to the distracted proprietor. "Good night."

He turned on his heel and passed through the swinging doors.

Ten days more went by, and at last the plane was completed and ready for its trial tests. It had been finished in phenomenal time, for the employees at the works, with all of whom Ted Scott was an idol, had outdone themselves to make it a wonderful miracle of speed and efficiency.

"We had to make it fast and make it right, as a matter of self-interest if nothing else," stated Mark Lawson, grinning. "For, oh, boy, you're carrying a lot of our money! We'll all be broke, with the poorhouse yawning for us, if you don't win this race against time. Even the errand boys have a bet on you."

"If it's as bad as all that, I'll simply have to win," laughed Ted. "I'd hate to put you fel-

lows in a hole. But I'll be able to tell better when I take this beauty up into the air."

It was with a beating heart that Ted Scott climbed into the cockpit and put himself at the controls. Suppose, after all this time and labor, the plane should not do what was expected of it! He knew what a difference there was between theory and practice. More than once a machine that was expected to prove a meteor had shown that it was only mediocre when it mounted into the air.

But the young aviator's trepidation vanished before he had been up for ten minutes. The plane more than fulfilled all his expectations. It worked beautifully, responding to the controls perfectly. And when, after subjecting it to numerous tests, Ted let it out for speed, he jubilated as he saw that it whizzed along at the rate of a hundred and sixty-six miles an hour.

"Mighty close to three miles a minute," he exulted. "That's traveling some."

At the end of an hour's test he brought it to the ground where a number of his friends who had been watching his evolutions gathered about him.

"How about it?" asked Walter Hapworth eagerly. "Did she do what you expected her to do?"

"All that and more," declared the aviator, as he stripped off his helmet and flying togs.

"Of course she's a little stiff yet and will be for a week or two until the newness wears off and everything is functioning perfectly. But for a first trial she's a wonder. I made a hundred and sixty-six and could have made more, but I didn't want to ask too much of her at this stage of the game."

"A hundred and sixty-six!" ejaculated Mr. Monet. "And you're figuring that you'll have to average a hundred and fifty or thereabouts to make the coast to coast trip in twenty hours."

"That gives you a margin of sixteen miles an hour," remarked Mark Lawson.

"Yes. But that isn't enough," replied Ted. "A few hours of bucking head winds would wipe that margin out and leave me in the hole. I need a possibility of two hundred miles an hour. But I'm confident I'll get it with this machine as soon as she is working smoothly."

"Have you thought of any name for her yet?" asked Breck Lewis.

"Not definitely," replied Ted. "It's a little early for the christening. Have you anything to suggest, Walter?" he asked, turning to Mr. Hapworth.

"I thought when I saw you zipping through the sky that she was shooting along like a comet," replied Hapworth. "What's the matter with that—*Comet?*"

"Fine and dandy," agreed Ted. "*Comet* it shall be. Let's hope that she'll justify the name."

Justify it she did in the days that followed. There were slight changes that had to be made, for the young aviator was critical and was not satisfied with anything less than perfection. But her speed steadily increased.

Bill Twombley dropped in during the course of the tests and, busy as Ted was, he gladly put all work aside for the time for a chat with his old friend.

"Whither bound, Bill?" Ted asked, after the first delighted greetings were over.

"On the way back to the Rocky Mountains," replied Bill. "Bruin is short-handed and he's been telegraphing me almost every day to hurry and get back on the job. Wish you were going along, Ted. All the old gang would be tickled to see you again."

"There's nothing I would like better," replied Ted. "I often think of Roy Benedict and Ed Allenby and the rest of that bunch of good fellows. I may stop over at Denver on my way back from the coast."

"How are you feeling about the contest, Ted?" asked Bill. "Think you're going to make it in twenty hours?"

"It's Los Angeles in twenty hours or bust," and Ted grinned. "If my plane doesn't go

back on me and the weather isn't too bad, I hope to make it. But those are two mighty big ifs."

"Right they are," agreed Bill. "But if anybody on earth can do it you can. I'm betting my shirt on you."

"Hope you don't lose it," laughed Ted. "It would be awful to be shirtless when winter comes."

"I expect to win enough to buy me a whole new gaudy outfit," replied Bill, grinning. "But talking about betting, Ted, there's a heap of money being put up all over the country."

"I know there is," replied Ted, with a frown. "A good deal more than suits me."

"You can't keep people from doing it," replied Bill philosophically. "There's one funny thing about it though that I don't like."

"What's that?"

"That all the professional gamblers are betting against you."

CHAPTER IX

Suspicious Happenings

"Well, why shouldn't the professional gamblers bet against me if their judgment points that way?" asked Ted Scott in response to Bill Twombley's statement. "That simply means that in view of the many difficulties in the way they think I won't be able to overcome them."

"Yes, but on the other hand there's your record," returned Bill. "You've never made a failure yet. You've got everything you ever tried for. As I look at it, that points to the probability that you'll keep the slate clean by winning this race against time, too."

"In one way, yes," replied Ted. "On the other hand, there's the law of averages. On general principles I'm about ready for a break, and perhaps they think it's coming now."

"Put it another way," said Bill. "Here's a racehorse, for instance. He's won half a dozen races in succession. He comes to the seventh race. Is the bulk of the betting going to be on him or against him?"

"On him, of course."

"Exactly," agreed Bill. "That is, if the race is straight. But if, when you got to the track you found that all the big money was being bet against him, what would you think?"

"That they had some inside information that he was going to lose," admitted Ted.

"Well, then," continued Bill triumphantly, "if, despite your victories and your unbroken record, they're betting against you and even offering odds that you'll lose, isn't it because they have some inside information that you're going to lose?"

"How can they know that?" parried Ted.

"Because the word has been passed down the line that you're going to be made to lose," declared Bill earnestly. "In other words, they're cooking up something to stop your winning, something dirty, something crooked, something dangerous. Those birds don't bet so recklessly unless they think they have a sure thing. Take a tip from me, Ted. They're going to try to beat you before you ever set foot in the plane to start the race."

Ted Scott was startled. He had been so busy with his work that he had paid practically no attention to the course of the betting. In a general way he knew that large sums were being wagered, but he had assumed that these were at even money. This would represent a

fair difference of opinion. But he had not known that odds were being offered against him. It was not an odds-on proposition. That hardened and unscrupulous professional gamblers were freely offering odds against him would seem to imply, as Bill Twombley had suggested, something under the surface. And that something could be only ominous and sinister.

"I'm glad that you told me this, Bill," he said, after a pause. "I've had some little local trouble along that line already, but I had thought that that would be confined to this town," and he went on to tell his friend of the dropped brick and the doped gum.

Bill Twombley listened with a grave face.

"That's bad," he said. "But, as you say, that's local. You had those birds jugged and they're out for revenge. But they're amateurs and not as dangerous as professional criminals. The crooked gamblers will do things on a bigger scale. I wish, Ted, that this race was over or, better still, that you'd never engaged in it."

"Well, I am in it up to the hilt," replied Ted. For that matter, I wouldn't draw out of it if I could. I'm going to see this thing through, Bill, and I'm going to win. Those professional gamblers will laugh out of the wrong side of their mouths when they find that they've lost their coin. I won't be asleep while they're trying out their bags of tricks. So forget it, Bill,

and come up with me for a spin in my new machine. I've got it in mind to show you some speed that will make your hair curl."

"Is that a threat or a promise?"

"A promise," laughed Ted. "I know what a speedhound you are."

At about the time this conversation was going on, another of a different tenor, but still having Ted Scott as its subject, was taking place in the sumptuously furnished private apartment of Brewster Gale in the Hotel Excelsior.

That man was sitting at his desk with a deep scowl on his heavy-jowled face as he glared at his two sons, who were sprawled out in their chairs with looks on their faces that were half-sheepish, half-defiant and wholly uncomfortable.

"A pretty mess!" snapped the elder Gale viciously. "Here I am up to my neck in about ten thousand dollars' worth of bets against Ted Scott. If you'd done your work as you ought to have done it, I'd be sitting pretty now."

"Oh, come off," growled Greg. "Didn't we do just what you told us to do? Didn't I slip that doped gum into his pocket? Didn't Duck drop the brick?"

"Bunglers, both of you!" snapped his father. "Dropped the brick and didn't hit him! Slipped the gum in his pocket and left with it a

cigarette of a brand sold only here that may afford him a clue and get us into a heap of trouble! Bright boys, you are! Couldn't even lick him when you were two against one!"

"He took me by surprise," growled Greg.

"If Wellman hadn't interferred, I'd have soaked him good and plenty," mumbled Duck.

"What's the use of all this beefing, anyway?" asked Greg sullenly. "The fact is that he's still safe and sound, bad luck to him! What comes next? Where do we go from here?"

Brewster Gale's face was a mirror of evil passions. He sprang to his feet.

"Blest if I know!" he ejaculated.

"You're not going to quit now when you've put up nearly ten thousand dollars, are you?" asked Greg, with a thinly concealed sneer.

"Why not get somebody in from outside?" suggested Duck. "There are plenty of fellows who would do anything you want. For a thousand dollars they'd put him in the hospital."

"Do you mean import thugs?" asked Brewster Gale, at the same time looking around nervously to see if the windows were closed.

Duck nodded.

The elder Gale considered for a moment. Then he shook his head.

"No, that would be too raw," he said. "You know how popular that fellow is. If Ted Scott

were deliberately injured, the people would never rest until they had run down the man who did it, and if he were caught, he'd peach on us. Even if he weren't caught, he'd have a club over us and could blackmail us for the rest of his life. No, whatever happens to Ted Scott must have the form of an accident."

"That sounds easy," grumbled Greg. "But accidents don't grow on every tree."

Brewster Gale pondered for the next five minutes, while his sons waited skeptically.

"If we could wreck that plane of his, it would be just as good as putting him personally out of commission," he said at length. "He couldn't possibly build another one in time for the race, and if he doesn't start by the day set, he loses."

"Nothing doing," said Greg gloomily. "We can't get near it in the daytime and at night there's a guard set about it. I heard that a bunch of Ted's friends at the works, Jack Forrest, Mark Lawson, Breck Lewis and others, were taking turns at night in watching it. You've got to think up something better than that."

"Why not let somebody else pull our chestnuts out of the fire?" suggested Duck in a discouraged tone. "You don't suppose we're the only ones interested in downing Scott, do you? Look at the professional gamblers who have

bet their piles that he won't win. Do you suppose they're going to trust to luck when there's a surer way? Not on your life! I'll bet some of them are planning right now to put him out of business. Wait and see."

"Duck's got the right dope," muttered Greg.

"Getting cold feet, are you?" sneered their father. "Depending on others to do what you're too cowardly or too fat-headed to do yourselves! Suppose the others don't do it? Then I'm ten thousand dollars in the hole. Not if I know it! Look here. An idea's come to me just now. Listen!"

His voice sank almost to a whisper.

CHAPTER X

On the Brink of Peril

"Well, what do you think of her?" asked Ted Scott as he and Bill Twombley descended from the plane after their spin through the air.

"She's a peach," declared Bill enthusiastically. "And, my, how she can whiz along! I've done some tall traveling in my day, but never anything like that. If I hadn't had my helmet on, I think my hair would have blown off."

"No wonder," laughed Ted. "What would you say if I told you that at one time we reached a speed of two hundred and ten miles an hour?"

"Honest Injun?" asked Bill incredulously.

"Cross my heart and hope to die," asseverated Ted proudly.

"Then you've got that race as good as won already," declared Bill, with conviction.

"If the weather man is good to me," modified Ted. "And if nothing unforeseen develops in the working of the plane. But I can't expect the weather to be made to order. If I have to

buck against heavy head winds, it will be a different story. And you know what the Rockies are. I may find myself in a blinding blizzard or I may hit an air pocket going over those gorges."

"Oh, a dozen things may happen," conceded Bill. "The Rockies are bad medicine. But I'll bet my boots you'll make it."

"First you bet your shirt and now your boots," laughed Ted. "I'd hate like thunder to strip you that way, Bill. I've simply got to win now."

"A pretty tough job," commented Bill. "When the present record was made there were two fellows in the plane. They could take spells at relieving one another. Moreover, if anything went wrong, one could do the tinkering while the other stuck fast to the controls. They had the advantage over you in every way. Suppose, for instance, anything went wrong with a wing and you had to crawl out and repair it. You'd have to leave the control. And if the plane should start to make a nose dive, what would happen?"

"I'd be out of luck, unless I scrambled back quickly enough to stop it," was the reply.

"You'd have it a mighty sight easier, if you were flying from west to east instead of from east to west," remarked Bill.

"On account of the winds, you mean? Yes,

that would be a cinch, for you'll notice the wind is almost always blowing from the west to the east. I'd have a tail wind practically all the way. As it is, going from east to west I'll be bucking a head wind almost all of the way. You can see how it is by the records of the New York and Chicago Air Mail. The average flying speed between those cities is eighty-six miles an hour from New York to Chicago, while from Chicago to New York it is a hundred miles an hour."

"A difference of fourteen miles an hour," commented Bill. "That would count some when multiplied by twenty hours."

"Bet your sweet life it would!" agreed Ted. "There's another thing. With a high wind against me I'll have to hug the earth. The higher I go the stiffer the wind will be against me. Yet I'd be safer if I were higher, especially when I come to the mountains. So there you are. If I stay high, I'm safer but I'm slower. If I stay low, I'm faster but it's more dangerous."

"It does seem as though everything's against you," replied Bill. "You'll need all your luck to carry you through. If a rabbit's foot will help you, you're welcome to mine. It has all the advantages. It was caught by a cross-eyed darky at midnight in a graveyard in the dark of the moon and—"

"That's enough," interrupted Ted, with a laugh. "I wouldn't rob you of such a cherished memento. But now come home with me and have supper. The folks will be glad to see you. Charity, especially, thinks you're an angel since I told her of the way you rescued me from drowning when we were up in Canada."

Charity Browning, as well as Eben, did indeed welcome Bill Twombley with profusion and set before him a dinner fit for a king. Any friend of Ted's was a friend of theirs, but Bill, for the reason that Ted had mentioned, received an especially cordial greeting.

"Ever since you pulled my dear boy out of the water I've prayed to the Lord every night to bless you," said good old Charity.

"That's awfully good of you," said Bill. "But did Ted ever tell you how he rescued me from being burned to death when my plane caught fire in mid air?"

"Land's sakes!" ejaculated Charity. "No, he never told me anything about that."

"He wouldn't," responded Bill. "That boy's as dumb as an oyster in telling of the hair-raising things he's done. He's all for telling what the other fellows have done."

"I know," said Charity, patting Ted's shoulder proudly. "I have the hardest work to drag anything out of him. Half I know about him I have to get from the papers."

Bill left on the following morning, and Ted plunged with redoubled zeal into his preparations for the contest. The time was coming soon for him to be on his way to Boston, and every day had its own task to be done.

Several days after Bill's departure Ted was called to the telephone.

"Long distance from Washington," announced the operator.

Ted waited a minute until a call came over the wire.

"Hello! Is this Ted Scott?"

"Yes," replied Ted.

"This is Tom Ralston," came the voice. "How are you, old man?"

"Tom Ralston!" ejaculated Ted, in delight. "Why, it's a dog's age since I heard from you. Didn't recognize your voice."

"I'm all stopped up with a cold, and the connection isn't very good," was the reply. "Listen, Ted. I'm on my way west and thought we might get together for a chinfest."

"Nothing suit me better," replied Ted heartily. "Come a-running. And fix it up so that you can stay with me a few days."

"Can't do that," replied the voice. "But I'm passing through Walsingham on the branch line. Train stops there twenty minutes for supper. That isn't very far from Bromville, is it?"

"Only about fifteen miles," replied Ted. "I

could make it in my car in a few minutes."

"That's what I thought," was the reply. "My train goes through Walsingham about half past seven to-morrow night. If you could be there, we could have a little chat. It isn't long, but a whole lot can be said in twenty minutes."

There was a warm feeling in Ted's heart as he hung up. Tom Ralston was one of his dearest friends. They had worked together in the Mississippi flooded district, and the friendship there begun had been more strongly cemented as time went on. Good old Tom! It would be great to see him again.

Ted got his own supper a little earlier than usual the next night, stepped into his smart little roadster, and sped over to the town of Walsingham.

It was not a much traveled road and he let out the car to its limit so that in less than twenty minutes he had drawn up beside the station platform.

Promptly on time the long train drew in. There was a hurried outpouring of the passengers for supper.

Ted stood at the entrance of the station restaurant, eagerly scanning every face. No Tom appeared.

"That's queer," he muttered, with a pang of

disappointment at his heart. "Could he have missed the train?"

The telegraph operator came out of the office.

"Ah, there you are, Mr. Scott," he said. "I have a telegram for you."

"Thanks," said Ted as he took the yellow envelope.

He tore it open and read:

"Unavoidably detained. Stepped off the train some stations back to get a paper and was too late in getting back. Sorry. Will write.

"Tom."

"Too bad!" muttered Ted in vexation. "I wouldn't have missed seeing the old boy for a farm."

There was no help for it, however, and he stepped into his car and started for home.

He had traversed perhaps a third of the distance when, as he was passing a lonely spot, his ears were assailed by a piercing shriek.

"Help!" came a woman's voice. "Help! Murder! Help!"

CHAPTER XI

In the Toils

That cry of terror thrilled Ted Scott through and through.

At first the thought occurred to him that it might be due to a family brawl, some drunken fellow, perhaps, beating his wife.

But the scream seemed to have more in it than that. It sounded to Ted like that of one in mortal agony. And there was no doubt that it came from the throat of a woman.

A considerable distance back from the road he could see the outlines of what appeared to be an old, dilapidated farmhouse. There was a feeble light in one of the lower windows, but the rest of the house was shrouded in darkness.

Ted drove his car into the shadows of the trees that bordered the road and jumped out.

He had no weapons with him of any kind. He threw open his tool box, grabbed the heaviest wrench he could find, and hurried through the bars of the fence and up the pathway that led to the house.

The screams still continued, at times muffled as though by a hand held over the mouth, rising more shrilly at other times as though the hand had been pushed aside.

Ted reached the door and hammered on it with his wrench. There was no response. He could hear what sounded like a scuffle in an inner room, as though a determined effort was being made to stifle the screams.

Ted felt the knob of the door. It yielded to his touch. He pushed open the door and entered.

The next moment something heavy descended on his head, a thousand stars seemed to dance before his eyes, and he fell stricken to the floor!

How much time elapsed before Ted Scott opened his eyes he never knew.

His head ached. His arms and feet were tightly bound. He had been tightly trussed up so that he could scarcely move a muscle.

The light in the room was brighter now, so bright that it hurt his eyes and he closed them again.

He tried to bring to mind his actions just before he had received the blow that had laid him out. It was hard work, for his brain was reeling and consecutive thought was almost impossible.

Gradually it came back to him. He remem-

bered the screams he had heard, his hasty leap from the car, the speeding to the house, the trying of the door, his entrance into the room. There of necessity he stopped.

He could hear the rough voices of three or four men engaged in a low but animated conversation. Caution was coming to Ted now and he did not open his eyes wide again. He barely lifted the eyelids and saw things as in a haze.

There were four men seated at a table. All of them seemed to be of a depraved type. They had caps drawn low over their foreheads and handkerchiefs tied about the lower parts of their faces. Perhaps this accounted for the muffled sound of their voices.

The disguise, rude as it was, was effectual, and Ted had not the least idea of how they really looked. He strained his ears to catch what they were saying.

"Hustle the girl away. Jack," said one, in an authoritative tone that marked him as the leader of the gang. "She's done her part of the job."

"And done it well," said another approvingly. "Gosh, those screams sounded like the real thing. They brought that boob running. I almost bust with laughing."

"She's a good actress all right," agreed the one who had first spoken. "She ought to be

in vaudeville. But now get her away quick. Give her the two hundred we promised her and put her on a train. An' jest tell her by the way that if she ever squeals about this night's work, it'll be the last peep she ever lets out. She can't get away so far that we won't be able to find her."

"Righto," said the man addressed as Jack, as he rose and left the room.

Ted could hear an unintelligible conversation in the next room, interspersed with feminine giggles. Then the back door slammed and there was the sound of retreating footsteps. A moment later Ted heard the purring of an automobile as it darted away.

"That guy is taking a long time in coming to," remarked one of the thugs, as he cast a glance toward Ted, who remained perfectly motionless.

"It was a tough crack I handed him," said another. "But I had to make sure. You seen that wrench he had in his hand? He could have put up a hard scrap with that, if he'd got a chance to use it. And from the look of him he's a pretty husky guy. No use of taking chances, if you don't have to."

"A good night's work," put in another complacently. "A thousand for each of us. An' jobs ain't been so plenty lately, so that a thousand iron men look mighty good to me."

"Easy money, I call it," remarked the leader. "But remember it ain't finished yet."

The others stirred uneasily.

"There's going to be a mighty big holler when it's found he's missing," said one of them.

"And it's a long ride to the place we're going to hide out with him," added another. "They'll be ringing up all the towns we got to pass through an' the cops will be on the lookout for us."

"Stow your gab, you dogs," commanded the leader savagely. "You knew what you was doing when you got into this, didn't you? Trying to crawfish, are you? Why you getting so weak-kneed all of a sudden? This job has got to be done an' done right, see? If you back out, you don't get one cent of the thousand that's promised you. An' not only that," he added, "but you know what happens to them that tries to run out on Dago Dan."

The threat was evidently sufficient, and all signs of insubordination disappeared.

"Aw, don't get sore," said one of the men placatingly. "Of course we'll do what you say."

"Sure," agreed the other.

"You'd better," snarled the chief. "If you want your thousand, you've got to work for it."

Ted Scott had been drinking in every word of this conversation that meant so much to him.

He had thought at first that this was another plot of the Gales to do him injury. But he knew from the build of the men that Greg and Duck did not form part of the group. This was danger from another quarter, from the outside world or underworld, maneuvered and inspired by this unknown rascal known to his tools as Dago Dan, probably the head of some gang of professional gamblers.

So Bill Twombley had not been wrong when he had warned his friend that men with large amounts at stake would try to injure him in their endeavors to win.

Well, they were on the way to success, all right. At any rate, they had won the first round.

With caution, but gradually exerting all his strength, the young aviator strained against his bonds. But the scoundrels had done their work well. The shackles were of tough rope, but they might as well have been of steel for all the impression Ted could make on them.

For the time he desisted. Even if he were able to succeed, it would be of no use at this moment.

He reviewed the circumstances that had led up to his present desperate plight. He denounced himself bitterly for having come on this trip alone.

It was a cunning scheme, contrived with in-

finite pains, and yet with many chances of failure. But those chances had not materialized. Everything had worked to a charm from the viewpoint of his captors. They had well earned the money promised them by Dago Dan.

But had they yet earned it? Not fully, judging by the words of the chief of the gang. Something still remained to be done before the "job" was complete.

No doubt they had a secure hiding place somewhere and there he would be closely guarded. It was probably far away, judging from the remark that there would be many towns they would have to pass through before they reached their destination.

He did not give up hope. Any one of a dozen things might happen. He had been in tight places before and squeezed through. But he had to admit that few had been tighter than this.

He checked the current of his thoughts just then, for the conversation was renewed.

"How long have we got to stay around this old shebang?" one of the thugs asked of his leader. "The sooner we can make our getaway the better."

"We got to hang around a while yet," was the surly reply. "We can't do nothing till Jack gets back with the car. Then, too, the later it is the fewer the cars we'll have to meet on

the way. You and Bill go outside and stand guard," he went on. "There's no use of our chewing the rag here. You stay in front of the house and Bill can watch the back, and it won't be healthy for either of you, if you don't keep your eyes open."

The men obeyed and the leader of the thugs was left alone. He got up after a while and began pacing the floor. He came near Ted Scott and stood regarding him with a baleful smile on his face.

"Easy money," he muttered to himself.

Ted opened his eyes and looked at the man steadily. There was no use in shamming unconsciousness longer.

The bandit stepped back a pace, taken by surprise.

"So you're awake, eh?" he growled, as he recovered his self-possession. "Pretty stiff crack you got on the conk. Thought it would hold you a little longer."

"What are you going to do with me, anyway?" asked Ted.

"Well," replied the man, seating himself in a chair and taking out a cigarette, "most folks would think we'd done enough already. But I don't mind telling you that you're not going to stay here long. We've got a nice place all fixed up for you and we'll be taking you there soon. You're going to have a long ride in an

ottermobile and we won't charge you a cent."

"What's the big idea?" asked Ted. "Have you got any grudge against me?"

The man put out a deprecating hand.

"Not a thing, not a thing, buddy," he said soothingly. "You click all right with me. It's all in the way of business. I've got a job to do. And you happen to be my job."

He lighted his cigarette and lolled back comfortably in his chair.

"I happen to be working for a pretty particular boss," he went on. "He don't pay in no counterfeit money and he don't want no counterfeit job. It isn't healthy to make him peevish, so I'm going to do jest what the boss expects." This was said with an air of finality.

"Of course you know who I am," said Ted.

"Sure thing," replied the other. "You're the guy that was going to fly from coast to coast, Ted Scott. Only you ain't going to fly there, take it from me."

"The name may not mean anything to you," said Ted. "But it means a lot to some people. Do you think you can get away with this? The Government itself will take the thing in hand. You'll be hunted down like rats. There isn't a place in the whole world where you can hide so that they won't get you. They'll never let up until they have you nabbed."

"Applesauce!" responded the man. "We've

got everything fixed good and proper. 'Tain't as if we was killing you. Just a little vacation, that's all."

"Of course you're doing this for money," remarked Ted.

"What else?"

"How much?"

"None of your business," snapped the man. "They ain't money enough in all the world to make me call this thing off. And why? Because nobody backs out when he's promised to do a job for Dago Dan. I'm pretty tough, but I ain't nothing alongside of that bird. What he says goes. So you might as well save your breath."

He got up and stalked to the door.

"I'm going out to help the boys stand watch," he vouchsafed. "But mind, I won't be more than a few feet away, an' at the least sound from you I'll come in and make you wish you hadn't. P'raps I'd better take a look at them cords and see that they're all right."

He took the candle from the table, bent down and examined Ted's bonds with great care. To test them with both hands he put the candle on a chair.

"They're all right," he muttered in a satisfied tone, as he straightened up. "I've got to hand it to Jack. He suttinly made a good job of it.

"Mind now, no monkey business!" he warned. "One peep from you and I'll have you gagged. An' my boys are pretty rough when it comes to shutting a guy's mouth. If you think we're easy, jest try to start something."

He opened the door with a chuckle and passed outside.

Start something! What a mockery! How could Ted start anything, trussed up as he was?

There seemed no evasion of that ride that he had been promised. A ride to captivity, to the ruin of his hopes, to the thwarting of all the plans he had made for the memorable contest that meant so much to him. And not only to him, but to the loyal friends whose interests were bound up with his, to Walter Hapworth, to Paul Monet, to the host of friends who had wagered their money on him. And the agony of Eben and Charity at his disappearance!

Again he felt of the ropes that bound him. He strained against them with all his might, a strength doubled by his terrible plight. They refused to yield an inch.

He looked wildly about him for something that might help. Nothing was revealed by the feeble flame of the candle.

The candle!

A thought came to him, so fantastic, so wild, that he almost rejected it as soon as conceived.

And yet—and yet—

One chance in a thousand! But beggars couldn't be choosers. He must take that chance.

He listened. He could hear faintly the voices of the men conversing outside.

He began to wriggle his body slowly toward the candle, left by the bandit where he had placed it on the chair.

CHAPTER XII

A Dash for Freedom

Ted Scott's heart was beating like a trip-hammer as he worked his way toward the candle that now represented his only hope of salvation.

It was a slender hope. No one knew it better than the young airman. But it was all he had.

If one of the gangsters should happen to step inside, Ted's last chance would disappear. Or if one of them should merely glance through the window, he would see in an instant that the captive's position had been changed.

Slowly and toilsomely, Ted worked his body toward the chair. He noted that the candle was only half-burned down. That would give him all the fire he needed for the purpose that he had in mind.

No interruption came. The low hum of conversation still persisted outside.

Nearing the chair, Ted raised himself to a sitting position, taking care not to interpose

himself between the candle and the window, lest a shadow be thrown.

He raised his bound hands and held his bonds over the flame of the candle straining them as wide apart as he could so that the flame might strike the center of the cords.

The cords were dry and yielded readily to the heat. They did not burst into a bright flame at once, but began to smolder until strand after strand gradually gave way.

The heat was torturing, and Ted could feel that his hands were blistering. But he was keyed to so high a pitch that the pain went for little. It would be easier later on to find lotions for burned hands than comfort for a bruised spirit.

He did not wait until the cords were entirely burnt through. He stopped when he knew that a single hard jerk would break the remainding strand.

When he had reached that point he let himself down on the floor on his back and threw up his bound ankles so that the cords that bound them were directly over the flame. They also yielded until he knew they were close to the breaking point.

Taking care not to overturn the candle that had stood him in such good stead, Ted now wriggled his way back to the position that he had formerly occupied and lay supine. To a

casual glance it would seem apparent that he had hardly stirred.

But though his body was quiet, his mind was working feverishly. Now at least he could put up a fight for his liberty. It would be a desperate and almost a hopeless fight against three men of the character of those with whom he had to deal.

How should he go about it? This was the question that puzzled him.

His first impulse had been to open the door and rush upon his enemies, trusting that he might fell one or two of them in the panic and confusion that would probably follow his unlooked for appearance.

But they might be quick on recovering themselves and he would make an excellent target, framed, as he would be, in the lighted doorway. On the other hand, if he extinguished the light before making his dash, that very fact would put them on their guard against his irruption. No, that would not do. He discarded the idea definitely. He must try some other way.

He was spared the necessity of planning further by the opening of the door. The leader of the gang entered and paused with his hand on the door knob.

"I'm pretty sure that's Jack's machine I hear coming," he said to his men. "I know the sound of his car. When he gets here make

sure that he's got plenty of gas, for we don't want to have to stop anywhere on the road. If he's a little short, take some gas from this guy's tank."

"All right, chief," came the answer.

"Stand ready then to come in and help me carry this man out when I give the word," commanded the leader. "I want now to take a look through the place to see that we haven't left any clue behind."

He ranged through the rooms on the lower floor, making a careful inspection. When he was satisfied that everything was as he wanted it, he came into the front room and approached the place where Ted was lying.

"We'll have to be getting along now," he said. "I'll just take one more look at them cords to see that everything's neat and tidy."

He came close to Ted and stooped over to examine his bonds.

With a sudden jerk Ted snapped the cords. His hands shot out and closed upon the fellow's throat.

The astounded thug was yanked off his balance and fell with a thud to the floor. Like lightning, Ted swung over on top of him, his hands never relinquishing his grip, his fingers sinking deeper and deeper into the flesh.

The man struggled desperately, but he was no match for the seasoned athlete that mastered

him. His hands reached down to his belt as though to draw a weapon, but Ted's legs fastened about the arm and held it tight.

For a minute or two the combat continued. But there was never a doubt as to the issue from the moment that those sinewy fingers of Ted Scott got that deadly grip on the rascal's throat. Ted could feel the fellow's body growing limp and helpless. Then the struggles ceased altogether.

Ted relaxed his hold, for, vile as the scoundrel was, he did not want to endanger his life. He rose to his feet, breathing hard.

He snatched up the candle from the chair and held it close to the fellow's face. It was swollen and purple and the tongue was hanging out. But a touch of the man's breast showed that he was still breathing.

He looked about the shack and saw lying on the floor the wrench he had brought with him when he had come to the supposed rescue of the woman decoy.

Then he extinguished the candle and approached the door. Before he reached it, however, it opened and two dark figures stood in the doorway.

"Why did you douse the glim, chief?" asked the one who had been addressed as Bill. "We ain't quite ready—"

The voice stopped as Ted brought the wrench

down on the man's skull. He fell senseless to the ground.

His companion stepped back and felt at his belt. But Ted hurled the wrench in the fellow's face and he staggered back. Before he could regain his scattered senses, Ted had leaped over the body of the man in the doorway and was speeding toward his car.

He found it where he had left it under the shadow of the trees by the roadside. In a moment he had leaped in, started the engine, thrown in the clutch, and was whizzing in the direction of Bromville.

Despite the pain from his burns and the terrible mental strain that he had undergone during the last few hours, Ted Scott's heart was singing as he sped along. He had matched his wits against those of his captors and triumphed. He had escaped at the moment that every door of escape had seemed closed against him.

He chuckled at the thought of the discomfiture of the bandits. Three of them, hardened thugs, outwitted and beaten by one man! He visualized their frantic rage when they should come to and realize what had happened.

Such scoundrels, however, ought not to be left at large, and Ted drove straight to the Bromville police station.

"What's up, Ted?" asked the chief of police,

Dugan by name, as he looked in surprise and with a beginning of alarm at Ted's disheveled appearance.

"Plenty," replied Ted. "Can you get two or three of your men, Dugan, and come along with me? I think I can promise you something of a haul. I'll tell you about it as we go along."

"Sure thing," replied Dugan, and called out three of his men in a hurry.

They piled into Ted's car, and as it sped along toward the scene of the outrage Ted told the main facts to Dugan. The latter was ablaze with wrath.

"The scoundrels!" he ejaculated. "If we can only reach them before they make their getaway! Step on the gas, Ted! For the love of Mike, step on it!"

Ted stepped on it with right good will and in a few minutes they were abreast of the lonely house. The chief and his companions jumped down, and with drawn weapons approached the dilapidated shack.

Their caution was needless. The birds had flown.

The policemen surrounded the place and searched the house. There was nothing to indicate that any one had been there except a nearly emptied bottle of liquor, of which Dugan possessed himself at once in the hope of finding fingerprints.

It was evident that the one gangster who retained his senses after Ted's devastating onslaught had succeeded in reviving his two companions and escaping with them. The ground was hard and dry and showed no indication of the route the thugs had taken. Probably their car had returned in time to take them away.

Dugan was loud in his outcry against the ill luck that had thwarted the capture of the miscreants.

"Sure, an' I'd have liked to get them fellers myself. But let's go back to the station and I'll notify every police chief within fifty miles to be on the watch for 'em."

"Nothing in that, I'm afraid," said Ted. "You see, their faces were covered by their caps and handkerchiefs, and even if you had them stopped I couldn't identify them. I have some satisfaction, anyway, in knowing that I've given them something to remember me by. I guess we'll have to let the whole affair go at that.

"And just one other thing, Dugan. Keep this to yourself like a good fellow, won't you? No charge will be made by me, there's no entry on your blotter, and we'll just let the matter die. My father and mother would be frightened to death if they should learn what happened to me to-night. You know Charity and know

how she'd take it. A word from you will keep your men quiet. How about it?"

"I suppose I'll have to let you have your way, Ted," said Dugan reluctantly. "As long as you're making no charge it isn't an official matter. But, oh, boy, if I only could land those rats!"

"They'll get into the net sooner or later," prophesied Ted. "It's only a matter of time with those fellows. But here we are at the police station. Sorry to have bothered you and your men, Dugan, on this fruitless chase. Don't forget that mum's the word."

"I'm hep," replied Dugan. "And I'll pass the word to these club-swingers of mine. But come along in and let me doctor those hands of yours. It's too late for you to go to Meredith, and when it comes to burns I'm as good as any of the medicos."

Ted gratefully availed himself of the offer, for his hands were smarting. Luckily, the burns were not deep and the application of Dugan's lotions soothed them greatly.

Bidding his warm-hearted friend good night, Ted Scott made his way to the Bromville House and stole in softly so as to evade any questions from Eben and Charity.

He had almost reached his room when a door opened and Eben's gray head popped out.

"Hello, Ted," he said in a stage whisper, so

as not to disturb his wife. "Was getting rather worried about you. Thought your car might have broken down or something."

"No," returned Ted in the same low tone. "Just met some fellows who were so glad to see me that they wouldn't let me go. Kept me till after midnight and wanted me to stay longer. But I didn't stay."

"I see," said good old Eben, as he prepared to shut his door. "It's mighty nice to have such warm friends."

CHAPTER XIII

Skulking in the Bushes

It was with a chuckle at Eben Browning's parting words that Ted Scott turned into his room and shut the door.

But the smile on his face was only a transient one. The matter was too serious for joking. That night he had found himself enmeshed in a net that only the fortuitous aid of the candle had enabled him to break.

The experience had taught him how much there had been in the warnings of Bill Twombley and Walter Hapworth. His natural courage and a contemptuous disregard of personal danger had led him to take those warnings a shade too lightly. That night he had learned something of the cunning, the resourcefulness, and the ruthlessness of his enemies.

It was too much to hope that they would give up their project because their first plot had failed. He might expect a respite, perhaps, for a few days while the discomfited rascals were recovering from their rage and confusion. But

they would surely try again and would make assurance doubly sure as far as humanly possible. He must be on his guard day and night.

He looked around his spotless, beautifully kept room that spoke of Charity's anxious regard for his comfort. There was the bed with its snow white sheets turned down, inviting him to repose.

What a contrast this serenity and peace afforded to what he had endured a few hours since!

It was broken and restless sleep that the young aviator got that night. The smarting of his burns was in part responsible, but much more was due to the strain he had undergone and the tumult in his mind.

But his cold shower when he arose refreshed him considerably, and he resolutely put the grim events of the previous night behind him. He was able to dispense with his bandages, and as he studiously kept his reddened hands and wrists out of sight he managed to pass muster at the breakfast table without arousing in any degree the suspicions of Eben and Charity.

It was more difficult to do that around the works, however, and Jackson, his mechanic, noticed the blistered hands at once.

"Holy smoke, Ted!" he ejaculated, "what's happened to them hands of yours?"

"Got them too near a flame," Ted responded, with an assumption of carelessness.

"What's this about a flame?" asked Walter Hapworth, who, in company with Mr. Monet, strolled up to that part of the plant just in time to hear Ted's last words.

"I'll tell you fellows," said Ted, looking carefully around to see that no others were in hearing distance. "It's just as well that you should know what's going on below the surface. But it's understood that this is wholly confidential, isn't it?"

All promised silence, and Ted unburdened himself, telling of the attack upon him the night before.

His auditors listened with eyes full of surprise and indignation.

"It's astounding, unbelievable!" exclaimed Mr. Monet.

"The audacity of the scoundrels!" cried Walter Hapworth. "And this is America and the twentieth century!"

"You let them off too easy," cried Jackson, his honest face ablaze with wrath. "While you had that wrench in your hand you ought to have pounded them into pulp."

"They deserved it, no doubt," replied Ted. "But, as it is, I've given them something they won't forget for a while."

"I'll venture to say that those scoundrelly

Gales were at the bottom of this!" exclaimed Walter Hapworth.

"I hardly think so," replied Ted. "I couldn't make out their faces, but none of them had the build of Greg or Duck."

"They may have been too cowardly to appear themselves," hazarded Paul Monet. "But that doesn't say that they might not have imported those rascals to do it for them. A few thousand dollars would hire any number of thugs."

"I don't doubt the Gales' willingness to injure me—they've proved that more than once—but I think this was an outside job," said Ted. "They seemed to be working for a fellow they called Dago Dan and they appeared to be in deadly fear of him. Do you know who he is? Have you ever heard the name?"

"I have a vague recollection of having heard it in connection with the operations of a Chicago gambling ring," replied Walter Hapworth. "However, I'm by no means sure."

"I don't know whether or not you ought to keep this thing quiet, Ted," said Mr. Monet thoughtfully. "If you put the police on the job, they may be able to round up some of the scoundrels."

"If I were just a private individual, I might," replied Ted. "But unluckily I'm so well known that the newspapers would play

it up. They'd scent a news story and their men would be down on me like a swarm of locusts. I couldn't go on with my work, and I need every minute for it in the short time that remains. No, I'll let it lie. It's so near the time of the contest now that they won't have many more chances to do me harm, and after the race is over they'll have no object in doing it."

"Well, I suppose you're the doctor," rejoined Walter. "But this one thing I want you to promise! Don't go round anywhere alone. Make sure that some one's always with you. I'm at your service any time you want me. And I'm sure that Paul and Jackson feel just the same way."

"With the greatest pleasure," Paul Monet assured him.

"You bet I am!" declared Jackson.

"A bodyguard," laughed Ted. "It's awfully good of you fellows, but I'm afraid it will make me feel foolish. I've always been accustomed to doing things by myself."

"That lone eagle stuff is all right in its place," replied Walter, "but not when your liberty is threatened. If one of us had been with you last night, those fellows would probably have put off their attempt to some other time. Then, in all likelihood, it wouldn't have been pulled off at all. Come now, Ted, don't

be foolish. If you don't think of yourself, think of your friends."

"When you put it that way I suppose I'll have to give in," conceded Ted. "All right, I'll promise. But you fellows may be letting yourselves in for a lot of trouble."

"We'll take a chance on that," replied Walter Hapworth, and Mr. Monet and Jackson nodded a vigorous assent.

Several days passed before Ted Scott had to avail himself of his friends' promised good offices.

Then late one afternoon the young aviator found himself in urgent need of an appliance for his machine that he knew could be obtained at a plant in Greenfield, about ten miles away.

"Here's where I call your bluff, Jackson," he said, as he brought his roadster to a stop near where his mechanic was working. "It seems that I'm under bonds not to go traveling alone. So hop in, if you don't mind, and we'll run over to Greenfield together."

"Sure thing," responded Jackson. "I'll take just a minute to wash up and I'll be with you."

In a short time they were rolling rapidly over the road.

"There's a short cut where the road turns when we're about halfway to Greenfield," suggested Jackson. "We'll save considerable by going that way."

"Suits me," replied Ted. "I have an appalling lot of work on hand and I want to save all the time I can."

They were not far from Bromville when they saw a car approaching them.

"Those fellows seem to be hogging the road," remarked Jackson.

"Yes," replied Ted. "But they'll probably turn off more to the right as we come closer."

"It's those skunks, Greg and Duck Gale," observed Jackson, as he identified the occupants of the car. "Them loafers don't seem to have anything to do but drive around and raise merry heck generally."

The car approached rapidly. It was a much heavier machine than Ted's light roadster and the driver seemed determined to keep to the middle of the road, which at that place was rather narrow.

"Keep over to your own side!" yelled Jackson, waving his hand to emphasize his meaning.

But the car came plunging straight ahead without any sign of swerving.

"Look out, Ted!" cried Jackson, in alarm. "They're going to run us down!"

Ted swerved to the right just in time to avoid a collision, and the right wheels of his car slumped into a ditch on the side of the road.

Luckily, the depression was not very deep or the car would have been overturned. As it

was, it teetered perilously. Ted jammed on the brakes and after running a short distance the car came to a standstill.

Ted was white with rage, but said nothing. Jackson was furious and shook his fist after the retreating car.

"The scoundrels!" exclaimed Jackson. "Another second and they'd have come into us slam-bang. It wouldn't have hurt their heavy car much, but it would have smashed us into flinders. Was that just hoggishness or did they really mean to run us down?"

"It wasn't just hoggishness," replied Ted, "nor a matter of crowding us into the ditch, but of deliberately pitching into us. That adds some more to the debt I owe them. But that debt will all be paid with interest. Help me to get this car out of the ditch."

By the aid of some wood they gathered they made a flooring up the side of the gully by which the car was able to climb out to the road again. They examined it carefully, but apart from a couple of smashed mudguards, it seemed to have received no damage.

"I'm going to hunt those fellows up when I get back to Bromville and give them what's coming to them," declared Jackson. "My fingers have been itching to get hold of them for a long time past, and this gives me just my chance."

"No," replied Ted, "leave them to me. I claim first hack at them."

They resumed their journey and reached Greenfield without further incident. To save time they took the short cut along an almost untraveled road that Jackson had suggested.

Had they glanced back, they might have seen one more car on that lonely road, following them at a distance—the car of Greg and Duck Gale, who had an object in knowing what road they took and on which they would be likely to return.

The errand on which Ted had come took them longer than he had anticipated and dusk was gathering when he and Jackson started back.

They returned by the same short cut and, owing to the delay they had experienced, were traveling fast when, just as they rounded a turn in the road, Jackson gave vent to a sharp exclamation.

"Pull up! Pull up!" he shouted frantically. "You'll smash if you don't!"

Directly ahead of them a fallen tree blocked the road.

Ted's keen eyes had detected the obstruction as soon as Jackson had, and he instantly threw off the power and jammed on the brakes. But even at that the car was fairly brushing the

outflung branches before it came quiveringly to a stop.

"Just in time!" murmured Jackson, with a sight of relief. "Now why did that tree have to fall just now? We'll have to go back to Greenfield and come round the other way."

"I suppose so," said Ted, as he jumped from the car. "There's no room to go around it. Hard luck! But we oughtn't to leave it here this way, Jackson. Some other motorist might come along and smash into it. Lend a hand let's see if we can't get it off the road."

Though they tugged and hauled at it vigorously, it proved too heavy for them to move.

"Can't be done," pronounced Ted at last." But at least we can light a lantern and put it on the top as a warning. You'll find one in the back of the car, Jackson. Then when we get back to Greenfield we can report it and they'll send out men enough to remove it."

Jackson secured and lighted the lantern and Ted was about to attach it to a branch when he paused as a thought struck him.

"Odd," he said thoughtfully, "that the tree should fall when there isn't any wind."

"Right," agreed Jackson, a little startled. "I hadn't thought of that. There's hardly been a breath of air stirring all the afternoon."

Ted said no more but walked around to the

stump of the tree with the lantern still in his hand.

"Come here, Jackson," he called. "Look at this!"

Jackson came and looked. The trunk had not broken off because it was rotten. It had been cut, and freshly cut. Chips scattered around showed that an axe had been busy.

Jackson stared at Ted open-mouthed.

"Cut!" he gasped.

Ted stooped down and picked up some of the chips.

"Still warm from the friction of the axe," he commented.

"But—who—" stammered Jackson.

"S-sh!" warned Ted, holding up his hand.

He stood still and listened. His hearing was phenomenally keen and the night was still.

He thought that he could detect a faint rustling among the bushes that lay a little way off from the road.

"Well, I guess we'd better be getting along toward Greenfield," he said in a loud tone. To Jackson he whispered:

"Get into the car. I'll turn it around slowly with my strongest searchlights on. Keep your eyes open and see if you can pick up any one in the bushes. I'll do the same. If we see what we're looking for, we'll jump out and make for them. Quick work now."

"I see," Jackson whispered back.

They sauntered indifferently toward the car and climbed in slowly.

Ted switched on the lights and began to turn the car about.

In that dazzling semicircle of light everything in the zone stood out brilliantly.

"There they are!" cried Jackson suddenly.

"I see them!" shouted Ted. "After them, Jackson!"

Two figures broke from the brush and darted away like rabbits.

CHAPTER XIV

A Merited Thrashing

Ted Scott and Jackson leaped from the car and were after the fugitives in a flash.

Anger lent speed to their feet and they rapidly closed on the rascals.

Ted plunged into one of them like a load of bricks and brought him to the ground. Jackson grabbed the other by the collar and twisted his hand in it till the fellow's tongue hung out.

Choking, sputtering, and protesting, the miscreants were dragged back into the road. Then their captors released them.

The lights of the car fell full on the forms and faces of Greg and Duck Gale! Ted surveyed them witheringly.

"You unspeakable skunks!" he ejaculated. "You yellow dogs! I might have known that it was no one else than you who could do a thing like this."

"We'll beat you into pulp," gritted Jackson between his teeth.

"This—this is an outrage," stammered Greg.

"You'll pay for this!" blustered Duck.

"Oh, I'll pay all right," promised Ted, as he threw off his coat. "I'm going to start paying right away. And I promise that interest will go along with it. Take off your coats, you rats. You're going to get the trimming of your lives."

"What's all this about, anyway?" protested Greg, as he cast his eyes wildly about for some way of escape.

"Yes, what have we done?" put in Duck, as pale as ashes. "You—"

"Don't let's waste time in talking," interrupted Ted. "Come on, you skunks, and take your licking."

"Where do I come in on this deal?" asked Jackson. "You take one and I'll take the other."

"I don't want to be selfish, Jackson," said Ted, "but I'm going to change the looks of both of them and I won't be cheated. All I want you to do is to see that they don't run away. If they pick up a rock or a stick, pitch into them. Otherwise, just stand by."

Still Greg and Duck hesitated to accept the challenge.

"Afraid, are you?" taunted Ted. "Yellow as saffron! See if this will wake you up," and he slapped Greg square across the mouth.

Even a rat will fight when cornered, and with

a squeal of rage Greg sailed in, followed by Duck.

Ted met Greg with a terrific blow in the jaw that rocked him from head to heels. He ducked a swing from Duck and countered with a left that sent him sprawling.

Then the battle was on. Both were bulkier and heavier than Ted, but even at that they were no match for him. Their muscles were flabby from dissipated living, while his were like steel. Then, too, they lost their heads while he kept his. To cap it all they were cowards while he was filled with the joy of battle.

For full five minutes the battle lasted. Ted could have finished it sooner, but he did not want to. He had promised them the drubbing of their lives and he was out to fulfil his promise.

His arms were working like piston rods. He struck his antagonists when and where he would. He went round them like a cooper round a barrel. When they went down under his rain of blows he yanked them to their feet.

They got in some blows, but Ted's quick ducking and shifting made most of them glancing ones that did no damage. His own landed where he wanted them to. He purposely refrained from knocking them out. That could wait until he was ready. So it was only after the eyes of both were swollen and nearly closed,

their noses bleeding, and their faces like raw meat that he gave them the *coup de grace.*

A left to the point of the chin stretched Greg out on the ground. Another one right on the "button" put Duck out of commission. Both lay sprawling, Greg unconscious, and Duck nearly so.

Jackson was fairly dancing with delight.

"Oh, boy!" he shouted. "A beauty! A peach! That I should ever have lived to see such a scrap! I'll never forget it till the last day of my life. Oh, what a basting you gave those rats!"

"They had it coming to them," panted Ted, as he resumed his coat. "Get some water from the radiator, Jackson, and throw it over that fellow there," pointing to Greg. "I don't want to have to carry him to the hospital."

"I'd rather carry them both to jail," stated Jackson.

He doused Greg with right good will until the latter stirred feebly and opened his eyes as far as their swollen condition permitted.

"Where am I?" he muttered.

"Right here on the road, you dirty dog, where Mr. Scott has stretched you," Jackson informed him cheerfully. "And that precious brother of yours is right alongside of you."

Duck had raised himself painfully to a sitting position and was staring about confusedly.

"They seem to be pretty groggy," remarked Ted. "Here, Jackson, let's help them to their feet."

They pulled the disheveled wrecks upright, but their sagging legs would hardly support them.

"I suppose you have your car somewhere about here," said Ted curtly.

"Y-yes," stammered Greg.

"Then find it and get out," sternly commanded Ted.

"I—I can't see to drive," whimpered Greg.

"Me neither," muttered Duck.

They were so utterly done up that Ted was in a quandary.

"I don't suppose we ought to leave them here in this condition," he said to Jackson.

"Put them in the bushes and let them sleep it out," suggested the latter.

"I don't like to do that," objected Ted. "I'll tell you what, Jackson. You hunt up their car and put them into it. They're in no shape either to walk or drive. Take them home and I'll go back alone in the roadster."

Jackson grumbled a little, but complied. He found the car and hustled the two young rascals into it. Then he took his position at the wheel and drove off by way of Greenfield while Ted followed not far behind in his roadster.

"Where now?" asked Jackson, as Ted drew

up alongside when they had reached the outskirts of Bromville.

"Take them up to the Hotel Excelsior," directed Ted, "and dump them on that father of theirs. No doubt he had a hand in the doings of this evening. It'll be a case of having his chickens come home to roost."

He turned his own car toward home, while Jackson drove on to the palatial hotel.

The band was playing in the pavilion and the veranda was filled with guests as Jackson stopped the car at the foot of the broad steps.

A uniformed attendant stepped up to open the door of the car. He started back as he looked at the huddled, sprawling forms within.

"What—" he was beginning, when Jackson checked him.

"Listen, buddy," he said. "You'd better get the old man. Tell him to come here for a minute."

The attendant ascended the steps in a hurry and in a moment came back with Brewster Gale, whose face was drawn into a heavy frown.

"What's this?" he exclaimed truculently, as he looked into the car.

"It's them precious sons of yours," replied Jackson. "I picked them up on the road. They're pretty well done up."

"What's happened to them?" asked Gale, in alarm.

"They ran into a threshing machine," chuckled Jackson, "The name of the threshing machine was Ted Scott."

"Ted Scott?" cried Gale angrily.

"Better put on the soft pedal unless you want to make these fellows a laughing stock around your hotel," cautioned Jackson. "Yes, Ted Scott trimmed them both. And when you get a better look at them you'll admit he did a good job. So long."

He turned and went whistling down the drive, while the enraged father with attendants who were hastily summoned took the machine around to a back entrance and smuggled the battered rascals up to their rooms.

"Why, Ted!" exclaimed Charity, as her idolized foster son came into the room where she was knitting, "where did you get that bruise on your cheekbone?"

"Oh, it's nothing, Mother. I had a little fracas on the road," Ted answered carelessly. "You ought to see the other fellows," he added, with a grin.

CHAPTER XV

The Ominous Tick-Tock

Charity Browning dropped her knitting needles and peered at Ted Scott anxiously over the top of her spectacles.

"Oh, Ted, I hope you haven't been fighting!" she exclaimed.

"You'd have thought I was, if you'd seen me a little while ago," laughed Ted. "I haven't had such fun since Sitting Bull sat down. It tickles me every time I think of it."

"Whom were you fighting with?" asked Eben, laying aside his evening paper.

"Give you three guesses," replied Ted, grinning.

"I guess it was them pesky Gale twins," replied Eben.

"Hit it the first time," agreed Ted, as he threw himself into a chair. "And when I tell you why, I think that even mother will admit that I was justified."

"So you licked them both at a time!" chuckled Eben proudly at the conclusion of Ted's

tale. "Glory hallelujah! I only wish I'd been there to see you do it."

"Eben! And you a member of the church!" said Charity severely. "I don't deny that they ought to have been punished," she admitted guardedly. "But vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."

"Oh, come, Mother," chaffed Ted. "If you'd been there and had had a rolling pin, you'd have lammed them yourself. You know you would."

"I might have shook it at them," was all that Charity's principles would allow her to admit. "But, oh, Ted, it makes me feel dreadful to have those awful men plotting all the time to do you harm."

"Don't you worry, Charity," said Ted, patting her hand tenderly. "They usually miss, you know."

"Yes, but some time they may not miss," said Charity. "If anything happened to you, Ted, it would be the last of me. I'd just pray for the Lord to take me. Do, do be careful."

"I will, Mother," promised Ted. "But I don't think I have anything more to fear from them—for a time, at least. They're so bunged up that it will be a week before they can show themselves in daylight."

"Yes, but there's the nights," warned Eben. "Like most beasts, those fellows work best in

the dark. They may be blunderheads, but that wily old snake, their father, has got wit enough for anything that is evil."

"He has mighty poor tools to work with," observed Ted. "I'd like to see and hear the old scoundrel at this minute. I'll bet he's making the air blue."

"I hear he's got about ten thousand dollars up against you on this race, and that old money grabber would do a good deal to save or make ten thousand dollars," remarked Eben. "He's as dangerous as a rattlesnake, my lad. Don't be off your guard for a minute."

When Ted went out to the plant the next morning he found Jackson the center of a fascinated group to whom he was reciting with with great gusto the exciting events of the night before.

"I wanted to take on one of them myself," he was saying, "for I was just aching to get a crack at him. But do you suppose Ted would let me? Not on your life. They were his meat, see? And, oh, boy, the way that lad sailed into them! Biff! Bang! Shift and counter, duck and dodge, and then land one like a pile driver. Soak first one and then the other. Straighten them up with a left under the chin and then bring over a right that knocked them silly. And then, when he was afraid he might kill them if he kept on, just two pretty ones on the button

and down they go dead to the world. Say! It was a sight worth going miles to see."

"Hello, Ted," cried Mark Lawson, as he noted his approach. "Jackson is telling us that you're three heavyweights rolled into one."

"I see the story's losing nothing in the telling," replied Ted, grinning. "As a matter of fact, it didn't amount to much. Just two big boobs that had nothing but beef and didn't know how to handle themselves."

"Not when they ran up against a whirling wildcat," put in Jackson. "I never saw anything like it, and I've seen some beautiful scraps in my time."

"Gee, I'm glad that you soaked them good and plenty!" exclaimed Breck Lewis. "They've been asking for it for a long time."

"I suppose you saw them safe home, Jackson?" asked Ted.

"I did that," and Jackson grinned. "You ought to have seen the old man's face when he looked in and saw those dismal wrecks!"

"What did he say?" asked Jack Forrest.

"Asked me what had happened to them," chuckled Jackson. "I told him that they'd run up against a threshing machine and that the name of the machine was Ted Scott."

There was a general laugh at the apt description.

"I wonder what papa had to say to his dar-

lings when he learned that one man had licked them both," pondered Jack Forrest.

"You can bet it was plenty," laughed Mark.

What "papa" had said to his "darlings" was indeed plenty. Not indeed on the night they were brought home, for they were too befuddled to understand him. It took an hour or more to patch them up and bundle them into their beds.

But the next morning, after Brewster Gale had gone downtown to pick up what gossip he might about the affair, he summoned the twins to his private office.

They came in, sadly the worse for the fight, and slumped sullenly into seats.

Brewster Gale shut and locked the door and then stood regarding them sardonically.

"Two lovely specimens!" he burst out bitterly. "You're sons to be proud of—I don't think. Let one man batter you up until you look like the wrath of heaven!"

"There was a gang of them," muttered Greg.

"Two men can't fight half a dozen," growled Duck.

"Don't lie," snapped their father. "I know all about it. What is worse, the whole town knows it. That mechanic of Ted Scott's has spread the story all over the place. Ted licked you all by himself and Jackson stood by and didn't raise a hand. You've made yourself

and me the laughing stock of Bromville. I could hear people snickering as I went by."

"He hit me with a wrench," persisted Greg.

"Rats!" snarled Brewster Gale. "The only wrench he hit you with was his fist. He polished you both off good and pretty."

"What's the use of chewing the rag?" broke out Greg bitterly. "We did our best to carry out your plans, and if we didn't get away with it, it wasn't our fault."

"We just missed him by an inch when we drove him into the ditch," Duck excused himself. "And he came within an ace of smashing into the tree. What else could we do than we did?"

"What else could you do?" repeated his father, with a sneer. "In the first place, why didn't you get away from the place after you had felled the tree? What fool idea made you stay there in the bushes where he could yank you out?"

"We wanted to make sure that it worked," muttered Greg.

"If it was going to work at all, it would have done so just as well if you'd been hotfooting it home, wouldn't it?" demanded his father. "Don't you know that Ted Scott could have you arrested to-day if he wanted to? Any judge would commit you to jail for trial on Scott's and Jackson's evidence that the tree

had been newly cut and that you were lurking in the bushes near by, especially when it was known that you were Ted Scott's sworn enemies and had clashed with him before. Haven't you got brains enough to understand that? Oh, that I were thirty years younger and could do this thing myself without trusting to a couple of lunkheads! And not only lunkheads, but cowards. Both of you licked at one time by the same man! Pah!"

He turned on them a look of such scorn and venom that Greg was stung to resentment.

"Well, you're responsible for us," he said sullenly. "We didn't ask to be born. Perhaps if we had other blood in us we'd be different."

"That'll do for you," snarled Brewster Gale angrily. "Any more of that and I'll show you where you get off. At least, I've always had brains enough to keep out of jail."

"So far," muttered Duck under his breath.

The elder Gale strode to the window and stood looking out, his face like a thundercloud, while Greg and Duck exchanged glances signifying their desire to be anywhere else than where they were.

"We've got just one more card left to play," Brewster Gale growled. "That ought to prove a trump. It would, if any one but you two mutts were handling it. But I've got to depend on you because I haven't anybody else. Let's see,

on just what day is it that Ted Scott takes off for Boston?"

"His departure's scheduled for next Monday," replied Greg. "At least that's what the paper says. They're going to make a holiday out of it and all the fools in Bromville will be out to give the boob a royal send-off."

"Next Monday," mused Gale. "To-day's Wednesday. That ought to give us all the time we need. Is his machine still in the works or has it been taken out into the hangar?"

"In the hangar," replied Duck. "He's making tests of it every day, tuning it up for the flight."

"I suppose somebody's with it all the time," surmised Gale.

"Day and night," replied Greg. "Jackson, the mechanic, is there all day long and some of Scott's pals look after it at night. There's no getting near it, if that's what you're hinting at. The last time we were around there Jackson ordered us off the grounds."

"We'll forget all about Jackson," replied his father. "It's at night this thing has got to be done, if it's done at all."

What that thing was he did not speak of aloud.

In the meantime Ted Scott was busy completing his tests of the *Comet*. There had been numerous changes, mostly small, but each tend-

ing to greater buoyancy, balance, speed, and safety.

"There she is," said the young aviator at last, with a sigh of relief. "If there's any way of making her better, I don't know what it is. She's fit to fly for a man's life."

"She's certainly a beauty," conceded Walter Hapworth, as he walked about the plane, noting her symmetrical lines. "But she'll not be flying for a man's life, but for a whole pot of money. The amount we've put up ourselves is only a drop in the bucket. There must be millions bet on this race. It's one of the biggest sporting events in my recollection."

"What are the odds?" asked Ted. "I've been so busy that I haven't paid any attention to them."

"They're still against you," replied Walter, a worried crease showing on his brow. "They are running about five to three that you won't do it. I don't like the looks of it, Ted. It seems as though somebody must have something up his sleeve."

"Dago Dan, perhaps," thoughtfully suggested Ted.

"Yes; and likely enough others of his kind," was the reply. "Brewster Gale, perhaps, to mention some one nearer home."

"I imagine his teeth have been pretty well drawn," conjectured Ted. "I haven't seen

hide or hair of those misfits of his since they took their licking."

"Which doesn't say that they're not dangerous," warned Walter. "I'll feel mighty good when we once get clear of Bromville. I say 'we,' because I'm planning to go with you to Boston, if I may."

"Sure thing," replied Ted warmly. "If I haven't said anything to you about it, it's because I took it for granted. Jackson, too, of course, will go along."

"Of course," agreed Mr. Hapworth. "You'll need him to help you up to the very minute of your cross-country start."

Bromville was very much wrought up over the contest, as indeed it always was over anything in which Ted Scott was a leading figure. He was far and away the most distinguished citizen of the town. His fame and exploits had put the town in the public eye and no place of its size was better known or more frequently mentioned in news stories throughout the length and breadth of the United States. It seemed certain that a record-breaking crowd would be in attendance on the occasion of his leaving for Boston.

By Saturday night the young aviator had everything in readiness for the supreme test. Sunday was spent in rest, but bright and early Monday morning Ted was down at the flying

field where he was speedily joined by Walter Hapworth, Paul Monet and others of his close friends.

"Everything been quiet through the night, Bill?" he asked of Bill Ellison, who had taken the last shift in watching over the plane.

"Pretty much," replied Bill, stifling a yawn. "There was a litle rumpus about three o'clock this morning."

"What do you mean by a little rumpus?" asked Ted, instantly on the alert.

"A scrap, I guess, between a couple of drunks," replied Bill. "Somebody was shouting murder at a great rate. I ran out to see what was happening, but maybe they thought a cop was coming and they faded away."

"I see," said Ted thoughtfully.

It was with greater care than usual that he scrutinized every inch of the plane that morning. Bill Ellison's story had made him vaguely uneasy. But everything about the plane was perfectly shipshape.

Yet that sixth sense of his seemed to sharpen all the others. He stood perfectly still and listened.

"Something is ticking," he announced. "Got a clock anywhere around here?"

"No," replied Jackson wonderingly. "I depend on my watch."

A startling memory flashed across Ted's

mind. Once before he had heard an ominous ticking that had nearly ticked his life away.

He swept his eyes over the hangar. Far up, resting on a beam, something protruded, a cylindrical object, sinister looking.

"Roll the plane outside, Jackson!" he shouted. "Quick! Everybody help! Walter, Mr. Monet, everybody! Quick! For your lives!"

CHAPTER XVI

The Explosion

There was something so terribly urgent in Ted Scott's cry, so fraught with danger and alarm that it thrilled the bystanders. They did not know what it meant, but they did know that there could be no dallying.

A dozen hands were applied to the plane and it was trundled hurriedly out into the open.

Simultaneously with his cry Ted had started to climb up the side of the hangar. From beam to beam he made his way until he was within reach of the wicked-looking object. He clutched it and leaped to the floor.

"Clear the track!" he yelled, as he rushed out of the hangar. "Scatter!"

Those in the vicinity almost fell over each other in getting out of the way.

Near by was a deep pool of water, used in washing the machines. Ted rushed to this and hurled his burden into the depths. An instant later there was a muffled roar, and a geyser of water shot up to a great height, drenching

some of the startled group as it came down.

"A bomb!" cried Mr. Hapworth in horror.

"That's just what it was," declared Ted, all his nerves in a tingle at his narrow escape. "A time bomb, just ready to go off. Another minute and it would have exploded in the hangar."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Mr. Monet. "It might have killed any number of us."

"Killed or maimed," agreed Ted. "Probably I was the special target aimed at. Or the plane. Or both."

"What abominable miscreant could have done this thing?" exclaimed Walter Hapworth.

Ted looked at his friend significantly, and that look spoke volumes.

"You mean—" began Walter eagerly, but Ted held up his hand to suggest silence.

"I have my suspicions," he said, "but I don't want to do anybody an injustice. It's a serious thing to mention names in the absence of definite proof."

But if Ted Scott was cautious, Jackson had no objection to stating his belief.

"It's them dirty rats, Greg and Duck Gale," he blazed out. "No one else in Bromville is capable of a thing like that, except their old man. And it's a dollar to a plugged nickel that it was the old scoundrel that put them up to it."

"I'll bet Jackson is right," declared Mark Lawson.

"But if it is so, how were they able to put the bomb up there without being seen?" asked Mr. Monet.

"That's easy," replied Ted. "You remember what Bill was telling us about the rumpus last night? That rumpus was staged on purpose to draw Bill away from the hangar. In that two or three minutes some one who was hanging around, probably back of the hangar, slipped in and put the bomb on the beam."

"Gosh!" ejaculated Bill, crestfallen. "That must have been the way it happened. And I fell for it! I'm a bum watchman."

"That's all right, Bill," said Ted. "Any one might have fallen for it. One can't think of everything."

"The police ought to be notified of this at once," declared Paul Monet.

"Right you are," agreed Walter Hapworth. "And the first thing they ought to be asked to do should be to find out where Greg and Duck Gale were last night."

"I doubt if that would get us anywhere," said Ted thoughtfully. "If they're really the ones who did it, they have their alibis fixed up all right. Easiest thing in the world. They go to bed at night. They ring for ice-water and some servant brings it to their rooms and sees they're in bed or undressed. At three o'clock in the morning they slip out unseen. A little

later they get back unseen. They know the house like a book. In the morning they ring for something. A servant brings it, finds them in bed waiting for it. There you are. That servant or those servants, if more than one, would swear in all good faith that they had seen them go to bed at night and get up out of bed in the morning. The presumption would be strong that, in the absence of any proof to the contrary, they'd been in the house all night. It's about as perfect as any alibi could be."

"Yes," agreed Walter. "But who knows but what some one saw them in the street at night?"

"It's possible, of course," admitted Ted, "but wholly unlikely. You know what Bromville is at three o'clock in the morning. As quiet as the grave."

"After all, we ought to put it into the hands of the authorities," persisted Walter. "What are the police for if not to run down the perpetrators of such dastardly crimes as this?"

"I agree with Walter," said Paul Monet gravely. "It's a duty we owe society to see that these scoundrels are arrested and punished."

"I think you're right," conceded Ted, "and I'm perfectly satisfied to have you, Paul, if you will, take it up with Dugan. Tell him all you know and what you suspect and leave the

rest to him. But I don't want it done till after I'm gone. If it came out now, it would throw a wet blanket over the big send-off that the townspeople are planning. Then, too, it might hold me up, make me stay here as a witness or something. By twelve o'clock I'll be off for Boston. After that I don't care what happens."

"Let it go at that, then, for the present," agreed Mr. Monet. "I'll take the thing in hand after you have gone. And I'm going to press the matter with all the energy I have."

A finer day for the start could not have been imagined. The sun shone brightly and a brisk breeze tempered the heat. Long before twelve o'clock the grounds of the plant were black with people, all anxious to show their idol what they thought of him and to wish him good luck in the coming contest.

A band played stirring airs and when Ted Scott emerged from the works, arrayed in his flying togs, the clamor of applause that arose was deafening.

People surged about him, anxious to touch his hand or pat him on the back, and it was all he could do to force his way through the throng to where the *Comet* stood awaiting him.

Mr. Hapworth and Jackson were already in their places, and Ted, with a smile and a last

wave of his hand, jumped into the cockpit and took his place at the controls.

He gave the signal and the blocks were knocked away. The propeller whirred, the engine roared, and the *Comet* zoomed down the runway. Her load was light, as the present trip required but little gas, and she rose after the first two hundred yards and soared into the skies.

But Ted Scott did not at once turn her nose toward Boston. Those warm-hearted friends were going to get some return for the trouble they had taken in turning out.

So for the next ten minutes he sailed majestically around the grounds and then over the town, making a figure eight directly over the Bromville House. Then he came back to the grounds, made a final circuit, and was off, shooting into the air like a rocket to a height of five thousand feet and started out on his journey.

The breeze was on their quarter and helped them along. The engines were working beautifully, and the *Comet* shot along at a speed that did not belie her name.

"If you can only have weather like this on your coast to coast trip!" exclaimed Hapworth.

"It would be all over but the shouting," replied Ted. "Ten to one, it will be blowing a

tornado right in my teeth when the day comes to start."

"At what time do you think we'll get to Boston?" asked Jackson.

"Before midnight, if everything goes well," returned Ted. "But the Boston airport is well lighted and it will be as easy to land as in broad daylight.

Toward dusk Hapworth called Ted's attention to a big plane at the right.

"Seems to be going in the same direction that we are," he remarked.

"More like following us," judged Jackson. "I noticed once or twice when we changed direction it did the same a minute later."

"Is that so?" asked Ted, with interest. "I'll put it to the test."

He swerved sharply to the right. A moment later the strange plane followed with the same maneuver.

"Queer, isn't it?" remarked Hapworth.

"Worse than queer, perhaps," replied Ted, a little uneasily.

It was getting dark now and in a few minutes they lost sight altogether of their uninvited traveling companion.

"What in thunder do you think is the explanation of that fellow copying our motions?" asked Walter.

"Don't ask me," replied Ted. "I guess, anyway, we've seen the last— What's that?"

The exclamation was evoked by a long trail of fire that streamed down in front of the plane.

At first Ted thought it might be the light in the wake of a falling star. But that thought was dismissed when several other blazing streamers came down all over and around the plane.

One of them landed on the wing and he saw that it was a bunch of oil-soaked cotton waste.

"By Jove!" he shouted. "They're trying to set fire to the plane!"

CHAPTER XVII

KIDNAPPED

"QUICK, Jackson! throw some water on that wing before it catches fire," commanded Ted Scott.

Jackson obeyed promptly and the flame sputtered and went out.

Ted pulled the stick and the plane shot upward. In the aftermath of the light left by the burning trails he could make out the black bulk of the plane he had seen a little while before.

It was making off now after its abortive attempt, but Ted put on full sped and was soon abreast of it, separated by a distance of perhaps a hundred feet.

"Take this stick, Jackson," Ted directed.

Jackson slipped into the seat that Ted vacated and assumed charge of the controls.

"What are you going to do, Ted?" asked Walter Hapworth, as he saw his friend reaching for something on the floor of the fuselage.

"I'll show you in a minute," replied Ted, as

he picked up a sawed-off shotgun. "Keep her steady, Jackson."

He raised the gun to his shoulder and fired.

There was a yell of fright from the occupants of the other plane.

"Did you hit them?" exclaimed Hapworth.

"No," replied Ted. "I wasn't trying to. What I wanted to do was to throw a scare into them and at the same time pepper the plane with shot so that it could be identified later. I guess I've done both. But just to make sure I'll give them another dose."

He let go the contents of the second barrel, and this, too, was greeted with affrighted yells.

"I guess that will hold them for a while," remarked Ted, as he laid down the weapon. "It's just as well that I had the idea of bringing this thing along. When we get to Boston I'll report the matter to the police and set them to looking for a plane that's marked with shot holes. From that, they won't have to go far to find the pilot. Give me the stick now, Jackson."

"I hope them birds caught some of the shot," said Jackson vengefully, as he surrendered the controls.

"Maybe they did," returned Ted, "though I tried to aim low. But that small shot scatters a lot."

The darkness had now swallowed up the other

plane and there was no object in pursuing it further.

"Some more of the Gale villainy, I shouldn't wonder," surmised Jackson.

"I don't think so," dissented Ted. "They probably put all their hopes on the bomb. This job may have been put up by my good friend, Dago Dan, or by some others of the same stripe. The time is short now and they're probably growing desperate."

"I'll feel mightily relieved when you've once started on your flight and are out of reach of these scoundrels," sighed Mr. Hapworth.

"Even then I won't be out of their reach," replied Ted. "You've seen from what has just happened that there's danger from them in the air as well as on the ground. Still, it will be harder, for they won't know just where to find me."

It was about eleven o'clock that night when the lights of Boston came into view. Ted had visited the city before, so he knew accurately the location of the airport. Even if he had been a stranger, he would have found little difficulty in reaching it because of the brilliancy of the beacons and the searchlights that swept across the sky.

He was cordially welcomed by the commander of the airport, who was on the lookout for his distinguished visitor.

"We feel honored that Boston has been chosen for the start of the great ocean to ocean race," he said. "Everybody is talking about it and you'll have a tremendous crowd out to see you off. I've got a little bit of coin wagered on you myself."

"That's a compliment," laughed Ted. "I hope that you won't drop your money."

"I haven't any fear of that," was the reply. "I suppose your trip from Bromville has been without special incident?"

"Only that some one tried to set my plane on fire," replied Ted.

"What?" exclaimed the commander. "You are joking!"

"This is not a joke," declared Ted, and went on to narrate the attack of that evening.

The official, Chadbourne by name, was profoundly shocked.

"I wouldn't have believed it possible!" he exclaimed. "I'll get in touch with the authorities and start them to looking for a plane that's peppered with small shot. If they catch the scoundrel that piloted it he'll be arrested and made to tell who hired him."

"I'll appreciate your looking after the matter," replied Ted, "for I'll be so busy with my preparations that I can't attend to it myself. But if you once get him jailed, I'll appear at the trial after my return from the coast."

Ted Scott saw to the bestowal of his plane in the hangar that had been made ready for it and which Chadbourne promised should be kept under the strictest guard night and day. Then the weary trio went to the hotel, where rooms had been engaged in advance.

Five days still remained before the ultimate date chosen for the race against time. But Ted did not figure on waiting till the very last day, if it were possible to avoid it. That day might prove a wretched one because of weather conditions. He wanted to have a certain margin of choice, and five days ought to afford it.

But the first day after his arrival was by no means propitious, as the weather reports told of gales raging in the Middle West. So Ted spent most of the day on the field at the airport, putting the finishing touches on his plane and attending, with Jackson's help, to the storing of fuel and supplies.

The latter still had some work to do when Ted went out from the field to the street. It was growing dark and a dreary drizzle bathed the town in fog.

"Taxi, sir?" called a driver, drawing his machine in to the curb.

"Yes," said Ted, giving the name of his hotel.

He stepped inside to feel himself caught in the grip of three brawny pairs of arms. He

struggled violently, but a wet cloth was pressed over his nostrils shutting off his breath. A heavy pungent odor assailed him and he felt himself going down fathoms deep into unconsciousness.

When Ted Scott awoke it was a long time before he realized what had happened to him. His head was reeling from the effects of the chloroform, the sickly sweetish odor of which seemed to permeate the place where he found himself.

He cudgeled his weary brain and tried to remember. Slowly, very slowly, recollection came back to him, not in a steady stream, but with abrupt gaps here and there that made him crease his brow anxiously as he sought to fill them.

He had been on the air field with Jackson storing the plane. Then he had gone outside on the street. It was raining, he remembered. He had hailed a taxi. No, it was not that. A taxi man had hailed him. He recalled the satisfaction he felt at not having had to stand long in the rain.

The taxi. Taxi! Why did his memory stop short there? Something had happened connected with the taxi. Had he stepped in? Had it gone on without him?

No, he had stepped in.

Then with a rush the rest came back to him —the powerful arms, so many in number that they seemed to belong to an octopus, the strangling hold on his throat, the wet, queer-smelling cloth pressed down upon his nostrils, his desperate struggles and then blackness and silence!

Where was he now? Certainly not in the taxi, for he was not sitting but lying at full length. Lying on something hard, quite unlike the beds to which he was accustomed.

He tried to feel what was beneath him, but his hand was jerked back abruptly. Then he realized that his hands were bound, not tightly together but with a slack of about six inches between them.

He moved his legs and found that they were similarly shackled.

A wave of rage rushed over him. He was a prisoner! His enemies at last had triumphed!

But where was he being held? The room was shrouded in blackness and gave him no indication as to his whereabouts.

But as his head grew clearer he became conscious of a gentle rocking motion. At first he attributed this sensation to his dizziness, but that explanation vanished when he heard the splashing of water against planks and the steady chug-chug of an engine.

He was on a boat. Shanghaied! Kidnapped!

And the day—the last day possible for his flight—only four days away!

Where was the vessel bound? It was a comparatively small one, as he could tell by the sound of the engines. Probably not an ocean craft. Yet it was plenty big enough to take him down the coast, to Florida or Cuba, perhaps.

After all, its destination did not really matter. It might have no port in view. All it needed to do was to idle around somewhere out of reach until those four fateful days were past.

Dismay gripped the young aviator as he realized all that this kidnapping meant. There was the loss of his own ten thousand dollars—but that was a small matter. He did not give it a second thought. But there was the thirty thousand wagered by Walter Hapworth and Paul Monet. And the innumerable numbers of other wagers made all over the country!

As he lay there, eating his heart out with anger, he became conscious that it was lighter in the room than when he woke. He turned on his side and saw a dim glimmer coming through a porthole in the side of his room.

Morning! And it had been barely dusk when he had been inveigled into the cab. He must have been sunk in that drugged slumber for twelve hours or thereabouts. And in that twelve hours the vessel had had plenty of time

to get far out of sight of land. It had been doubtless lying ready with steam up, waiting the outcome of the nefarious attempt.

He knew that by this time Walter Hapworth had enlisted the efforts of the police and that Boston and its environs were being gone over as with a fine-toothed comb. But even if they should think of the water, what possible clue were they likely to have?

He got awkwardly out of the rude bunk in which he was lying and made his halting way to the porthole. He measured it with his eye to see if it would permit the passage of his body.

Impossible! Not half big enough. But if he could not go through the aperture he could see through it.

And what he saw filled him with dismay.

No land anywhere! Water everywhere!

A key grated in the lock of his door.

CHAPTER XVIII

Taking a Chance

Ted Scott turned quickly as the door of the cabin opened and a man entered.

He was an unprepossessing individual, short, squat, powerfully built, his face bearing the unmistakable stamp of the underworld.

He started and stepped back as he caught sight of Ted standing near the porthole, and his hand went quickly to his back pocket. But a second glance at Ted's bound hands and feet reassured him and he did not draw his weapon. He advanced a step into the room, taking care, however, to leave the door open so that he could call for assistance if necessary.

"So you're awake, eh?" the man growled. "I thought that dope might keep you dead to the world a little longer."

"You guessed wrong," returned Ted curtly. "What is this boat and where is she going?"

The man leered evilly.

"If I told you that, you'd know as much as I do," he returned. "No use trying to pump

me, kid. The captain is the only one on board here that answers questions and mostly he doesn't answer them. I jest came in to see if mebbe you wouldn't be wanting some breakfast."

"So you're not going to starve me to death," observed Ted sarcastically. "That's awfully good of you."

"Now, now, kid, don't get sore," protested the other. "That won't get you anywhere. We've got you and we're going to keep you. But we're going to treat you nice and pretty as long as you stay put and don't show no rough stuff. We ain't got no French chef on board, but you'll get good grub and plenty of it."

"Bring it along, then," said Ted.

The man went out, carefully locking the door behind him, and reappeared in a few minutes with a fairly palatable meal.

"There you are," he said, as he arranged the dishes on the table. "Go to it."

"How can I with my hands tied like this?"

The man reflected for a moment.

"I guess I can untie them while you eat," he said. "But listen, kid." He drew an automatic from his pocket. "See this? It's got six pills in it and each one of them is sure death. Any monkey business and this goes off. Get me?"

"I get you," replied Ted.

The man untied the cords and then shifted his position to the further side of the table with his pistol bearing directly on Ted.

It was not the pleasantest condition under which to eat a meal, but the young aviator made the best of it. He ate heartily, not because he was especially hungry—the drug had taken away his appetite in large degree—but because he knew that he must maintain his strength so that he could avail himself of any chance of escape that might offer.

After he had finished, the man carefully retied his hands.

"I got to do this right, kid," he volunteered, " 'cause the captain is awful touchy and quick on the trigger if things don't go jest to suit him. But mebbe you'll find that out for yourself before long."

"I want to see your captain and talk to him," said Ted.

"Wanting is one thing and getting's another," was the reply. "But I'll tell him what you say. Then it's up to him."

He took the dishes and went out and Ted Scott was left alone with his reflections.

They were bitter enough. He lashed himself severely in his thoughts. Why, after all the warnings he had received, had he been so ill-advised as to go out in the street alone? If Jackson or somebody else had been with him,

the attempt would almost certainly not have been made. His contempt for danger had brought its own punisment.

Two hours elapsed while he was communing moodily with himself. Then he again heard the key turn in the lock.

A man of medium height entered. That he was not an American Ted saw at a glance. His swarthy complexion and coal-black hair and eyes bespoke a Southern origin, probably Italian.

"Haggerty said you wanted to see me," he said abruptly.

"Are you the captain?" asked Ted, without any sign of rancor.

"I ain't no sailor," was the response. "If you mean, am I the big boss around here, yes. The captain jumps when I speak. What do you want to see me about?"

"I am naturally curious to know to whom I am indebted for this unexpected sailing trip," returned Ted.

"Cut out the highbrow stuff," said the fellow roughly. "When you talk to me talk straight, see? You mean, why you're here? Because I want you here. Ain't that reason enough?"

"It is for you, I suppose," replied Ted, keeping a firm rein on his temper, "but not for me."

"You don't count," was the curt reply.

"Of course I know the real reason," went on Ted quietly. "Somebody is interested in keeping me from making that airplane flight from coast to coast."

The man kept silent.

"Am I right?" asked Ted.

"Go right on talkin'," said the fellow indifferently. "It don't interest me none. If it helps you to blow off steam, all right. Talk is cheap."

"Not when money comes into it," observed Ted. "Of course you're not doing this for fun. You're doing it for money. But perhaps I can top any money you've been offered for this job. I'll give you ten thousand dollars if you'll set me on shore anywhere in New England within the next twenty-four hours. And I'll promise to take no steps toward having you arrested and prosecuted."

The man shook his head, though the big sum mentioned brought into his eyes a look of heightened respect for the one who offered it.

"You're on the wrong steer, kid," he said. "What good would ten grand do me if I was in my grave? And that's where I'd be if I took your kale. Nothin' doin'."

Another illustration, thought Ted, of the power that the kings of the underworld exert over their tools. He changed his tactics.

"Well," he sighed resignedly, "I suppose

I'm up against it and have got to take my medicine."

"Now you're talkin' sense," said the fellow in a more conciliatory way. "When a guy's licked, what's the use of kickin'? Ain't no reason why we can't get along nice an' comfortable, if you look at this thing right. We ain't got no grudge against you personal. It's all in the line of business."

"Well, that being so," said Ted, with a pleasant smile, "I suppose you'll have no objection to setting me on shore as soon as the last day set for the start of the race is over. It's all off after that day, you know."

The thug glanced at him suspiciously, but Ted's face expressed only acquiescence in his fate.

"You'll find that out when the time comes," he replied.

"Oh, that's all right," agreed Ted resignedly. "It doesn't matter much, anyway, for my goose will be cooked. I just thought that you'd have done your job and would be glad to get rid of me. Of course my family will be anxious about me."

"I should worry about your family!" sneered the fellow callously. "Now you've had your little say an' I ain't goin' to do any more talkin'."

He turned to go out.

"Just a minute," said Ted, with a smile. "You spoke a little while ago about our getting along nicely and comfortably. But I can't be very comfortable with my legs and hands tied. What's the matter with taking them off? You've got me safe, anyhow."

"I ain't takin' no chances," said the man surlily.

"But what possible chance is there in that?" asked Ted. "I haven't wings. I can't fly. And that's the only way I could get away from this ship."

The fellow paused and seemed to consider.

"You might cut up rough if your hands and feet were free," he remarked. "If it wasn't for that, you might have the freedom of the boat, for all I care."

"Oh, I see," said Ted, with a suggestion of a taunt in his voice. "You're afraid of me. You, with a whole crowd of tough lads, all of you, I suppose, with guns, afraid of one man who hasn't got as much as a toothpick! And I've always supposed you boys weren't afraid of anything that walks in two shoes!"

The shaft went home. It touched the fellow's professional pride, as Ted had intended it should.

"Say, fella, you're talkin' through your bonnet!" he exclaimed. "These buddies of mine are so tough that if they fell off a skyscraper,

it's the sidewalk would get hurt, not them. Afraid? I'll show you how afraid we are. Mike, come here!" he called.

A big red-bearded man appeared at his summons.

"Take the ropes off of this guy," the leader commanded.

The man looked at his superior a little wonderingly, but obeyed.

"That's all right, Mike," said the chief. "Now get along."

Mike disappeared and his boss turned to Ted.

"Now, fella," he said, "that shows you how scared we are of you. You don't click with us at all any more than a baby would. We got you just where we want you. All the same, you'll find we're regular fellows if you play along with us right. We don't want to hurt you unless we have to. You can even come and have your meals with us if you want to. But just remember that you're goin' to stay on this boat as long as we want to keep you."

"Oh, I understand that," acceded Ted. "You hold all the trumps in the game. I'm not fool enough to make you play them."

"You bet I hold the trumps," was the reply. "Now listen, fella. You can go anywhere you like on this boat as long as you act nice and pretty an' keep your mouth shut. If I catch you sayin' one word to any of the gang, I'll

fix you. An' all the time you're on deck, some one of the boys will be within six feet of you, watchin'."

"All right. I'm not so dumb. I throw down my hand. You take the pot. And I take back what I said a little while ago. You're not scared. You're a dead game sport."

The fellow gave a grunt of gratified vanity and went out, leaving the door open.

Ted did not at once avail himself of his freedom to range the boat. His arms and legs were cramped from their bondage. He rubbed them vigorously and stamped about the cabin until he had restored the circulation.

Only when he felt that they were as strong and supple as ever did he think of going on deck.

The terrible depression that he had felt when he first found himself a captive had to an extent vanished. A gleam of hope had crept into his heart.

Not that he could have given any good reason for that. He was still utterly in the power of the men who had kidnapped him, far from friends or any hope of rescue. All they had to do was to keep cruising around until the ultimate date for the starting of the race had passed.

He had won the first round in the verbal combat by playing on the vanity of his captor.

But apart from the personal comfort of being able to move around, what good would that do him? He seemed as far from real freedom as ever.

Still, it was good to breathe deep draughts of the salt air when at last he sauntered out on deck.

He found himself on a long, stout motor launch, which, while not big enough to venture far out to sea, was yet plenty large enough for cruising about the coast.

A quick glance told him that there were about a dozen men in sight. Several of these seemed to be sailors, moving about on various tasks connected with the handling of the craft.

But the majority were of the same stamp as the leader. Some had sinister-looking faces, while others seemed good-natured enough, of the ne'er-do-well stamp that always hang about seaports, ready for any job and not too scrupulous as to what it is.

They were engaged, some in playing craps, others cards, but at Ted's appearance one of them rose quickly and came over to his vicinity.

He said not a word, and Ted, mindful of the leader's warning, betrayed no knowledge of his presence.

Ted ranged carelessly over the boat from stem to stern, and wherever he went the man drifted along like a shadow.

But it was not the boat that especially attracted Ted's interest. It was in what lay outside—the wide expanse of tossing waters.

Through this the boat was loafing along as though to kill time, at an average speed of perhaps twelve miles an hour.

There was no mainland in sight. At a distance of about four miles was a little group of islands, heavily wooded and each only a few acres in extent.

Land! Ted looked at it hungrily.

As he looked a vessel came in sight from beyond the shelter of one of the islands, heading in the direction of the boat on which Ted was an unwilling passenger.

There was a stir among the men on deck. The thought doubtless occurred to them that Ted might try to signal.

The man lounging behind Ted hurried up to him.

"Get below, fella," he commanded.

Ted whirled about and sent his right fist crashing into the man's jaw!

CHAPTER XIX

In Hot Chase

The astounded thug went down as though stricken by lightning.

The next instant Ted Scott leaped to the rail of the boat and dived headforemost into the water.

Shouts of rage and the scurrying of feet were in his ears as he went down. He did not seek to check his dive when he struck. The farther he went down the longer he could swim under water.

He had been near the stern of the boat when he had dived, and he had noted from the course of the oncoming vessel that it would cut across the wake rather than the bow of the boat from which he had escaped.

He swam under water as long as possible and it was only when his head was reeling and his lungs seemed ready to burst that he rose to the surface.

A wild clamor broke out on his appearance. But the momentum of the boat had carried it

far ahead and he was now out of range of shots, assuming that his captors would be ready to resort to such desperate measures.

From the jangling of bells in the engine room Ted knew that frantic orders were being given to bring the launch about. But it took some time before the speed could be checked and the boat swung around.

All this time the strange vessel was coming closer. It seemed as though through their glasses the officers aboard had sensed the excitement and surmised it was worth looking into, for the boat was now coming on at railroad speed, sending great sheets of spray from her bow as she cut the water.

Ted in the meantime was swimming with all his might toward the oncoming boat. It represented his only hope of salvation. He must reach it before his captors reached him, or all his work would have gone for naught.

It had fully turned now, that boat that bore his enemies, and was bearing down on him. It was a question which vessel would reach him first.

On came the motor launch under a full head of steam, the thugs standing in a group at the bow, waving their arms and hurling threats at the fugitive.

Ted threw a glance over his shoulder. What miracle had happened? The pursuing boat had

suddenly veered off sharply to the right and was making off at all speed.

He shook the water from his eyes and looked toward the strange vessel. He could see the officers and crew crowding aft, some with ropes in their hands to throw to him.

But he saw more than that. He saw the United States flag floating at the stern. His heart leaped. A federal revenue cutter!

The cutter slackened speed as it drew near Ted Scott and a couple of ropes were thrown overboard.

He grabbed the nearer one and was quickly hauled up to the deck.

"I guess we came along just in the nick of time," remarked a man in captain's uniform. "Who are you and what's the trouble?"

"My name is Scott," panted Ted, and got no further.

"Not Ted Scott, the flyer?" exclaimed the captain, while a murmur rose from the others.

"Yes," replied Ted.

"By Jove!" cried the captain, as he grasped Ted's wet hand and shook it warmly. "It's only an hour ago that we got a wireless telling us of your mysterious disappearance and directing us to be on the watch for suspicious vessels. Just a minute."

He gave the signal for full speed ahead and the vessel shot in pursuit of the thugs' boat,

which now, owing to the stoppage to pick up Ted, had got a long start.

The captain turned to Ted.

"I never thought I'd have the honor of pulling the most famous aviator in America out of the water," he said, with a smile. "My name's Allison. Now tell me all about it."

In a few brief sentences Ted told of the kidnapping and the events that had followed.

"Drugged and kidnapped!" exclaimed Captain Allison when Ted had finished. "The scoundrels! Well, they've reached the end of their tether. In a little while we'll have the whole gang."

"Do you think you can catch them?" asked Ted quickly.

"Watch us," replied the captain. "This beauty of mine can travel two miles to their one. The jig is up as far as they are concerned."

"They're all armed and they're a desperate gang," remarked Ted. "They may put up a fight."

"If they do, I'll blow them out of the water," replied Captain Allison grimly. "Murphy," he directed a boatswain, "get that one-pounder ready."

A tarpaulin was dragged from a gun in the bow and the weapon was turned in the direction of the fleeing quarry. The cutter drew up on

the fugitive boat hand over hand and was soon within speaking distance.

"Heave to!" shouted the captain through his megaphone.

No attention was paid to the order.

"Send a shot in front of her bows, Murphy," commanded the captain. "Don't hit her, but send it close enough to let them see we mean business."

The gun roared and the effect was immediate. The engines stopped and the thugs' vessel drifted along on her momentum.

The cutter ran down alongside and threw over grapplers that held the two boats together. The cutter's crew, armed with rifles were ranged at the rail, ready for instant action.

"Who's in command here?" called Captain Allison sharply.

"I am," replied sullenly a weatherbeaten man, whom Ted had not seen before.

"You're not any longer," said Captain Allison curtly. "You're a prisoner, together with your crew and passengers."

"What for?" expostulated the man. "I ain't done a thing but hire my boat out to a party for a cruise."

"You can tell that to the judge," snapped Captain Allison. "Come aboard. And bring those rats with you before I come over with a

squad and yank them out of their holes. Lively there, now!"

"I'll tell 'em," growled the man, and went into the cabin.

Two minutes later he emerged, followed by as crestfallen and abject a lot of thugs as had ever been gathered together. The eyes of their leader glowed with demoniac hate as they rested on Ted Scott.

"Come over one by one," Captain Allison ordered curtly.

Under the compelling muzzles of the rifles, the men obeyed. Some boards had been thrown over the rails, and across these the ruffians scrambled one at a time. As each reached the deck he was seized, searched, his weapons taken from him and handcuffs clapped upon his wrists.

"You dirty rats!" said Captain Allison witheringly. "You're going to get yours good and plenty. Ten years anyway, maybe twenty. Take them down into the brig and set a strong guard over them," he commanded. "See that they get nothing but bread and water till I turn them over to the police."

As they were being hustled away, none too gently, their leader turned his livid, scowling face toward the young aviator.

"If it's the last thing I do, I'll get you yet," he snarled.

"Naughty, naughty," grinned Ted, shaking his finger at the fellow, as though in reproof.

"A good day's work," commented the captain, as the last of the thugs disappeared. "Now I suppose I can't get to Boston too quickly to suit you," he said, turning to the young airman.

"You bet you can't!" returned Ted. "Where are we now?"

"Off the coast of Maine," was the reply. "But you've seen how this beauty of mine can travel. I'll get you to Boston in a hurry."

He told off a detachment of his crew to take possession of the captured boat and take it into port. Then he turned the nose of the cutter toward Boston and kept the engines humming.

He sent a wireless, apprising the authorities of the capture, and when they reached their wharf a squad of police was at hand to take charge of the prisoners.

Walter Hapworth was there, too, and Jackson, their faces haggard with the anxiety they had endured but now lighted up with rapturous welcome. They fairly hugged Ted Scott in their delight at seeing him again.

CHAPTER XX

Off for the Coast

Ted Scott was whirled away to his hotel, questions and answers tumbling over each other as Walter Hapworth and Jackson listened to the story of his adventures and told him in return of the frantic way in which they and the detectives had combed every resort of the underworld in the whole city.

A bath, fresh clothes, and a good meal soon put Ted in first-class trim again. He called for a paper and carefully studied the weather reports.

"Looks pretty good," he remarked to Walter Hapworth. "The gales in the Middle West seem to have blown themselves out and fair weather is promised for to-morrow. Everything in shape, Jackson?"

"Absolutely," replied Jackson. "Oil, gas, supplies, everything. You could start an hour from now, if you wanted to."

"Good," pronounced Ted. "To-morrow it is, then, at three o'clock in the afternoon, unless

the weather changes and it begins to cut up rough."

The next day dawned bright and beautiful, with scarcely a cloud in the sky and a light, favorable wind blowing.

Just before Ted left his hotel a telegram was handed to him.

He tore open the envelope and read:

"Good luck, dear boy. Charity says she's praying for you.

"Father."

Moisture came into Ted's eyes. Dear old Eben! Dear old Charity who would be praying for him!

He put the message in an inside pocket close to his heart. If anything could bring him good luck, it was that.

The interest in the race of itself would have brought a great crowd to the field, but the intense excitement stirred up by the kidnapping augmented the throng still more. The police had to make a way through the crowd to permit the young aviator to get to his plane, which had already been brought out from its hangar and now stood poised, ready for the flight.

Ted made the careful last-minute examination of the plane that he never omitted and found that it was tuned up to the last notch.

He adjusted his flying togs, shook hands with Walter Hapworth and Jackson and the commander of the field, climbed into the cockpit, and gave the signal for the blocks to be knocked away.

A tremendous roar arose from the crowd as the *Comet* started down the runway. She was of necessity heavily loaded, and whizzed along for a considerable distance before she left the ground. But she did leave it when about three-fourth down the runway and rose buoyantly into the sky.

With it rose a flock of other planes, twenty or more in number, for practically every aviator in Boston and the vicinity was anxious to be in the squadron of honor that escorted the famous Ted Scott on the first lap of his coast to coast race.

As he sailed with the accompanying planes over the city a din of whistles rose from the factories, and this became pandemonium when the vessels in the harbor added their foghorns and sirens. It was a magnificent send-off for the young aviator in his contest against old Father Time.

One by one the escorting planes were left behind, for Ted gradually increased his speed until he was going like the wind and no one could keep pace with him. Once more he was

the Lone Eagle cleaving the air, the earth beneath, the skies above.

He headed directly for New York. His speed indicator climbed steadily until the plane reached the phenomenal rate of a hundred and eighty miles an hour—three miles a minute! Towns leaped into sight and vanished. Broad stretches of water were crossed so quickly that they seemed scarcely more than shimmering silver threads.

It was hair-raising, stimulating, intoxicating, and Ted Scott's heart fairly sang as the plane zipped along.

Almost before he could have deemed it possible the towers and skyscrapers of New York loomed up before him. Two minutes later he was flying directly across it.

The imperial city by the Hudson had been on the lookout for him, and the tall roofs were black with people who waved at him wildly, while the great ocean liners and every vessel in the harbor sent their noisy welcome swirling up to him in waves that beat against the plane and almost drowned the roar of his motors.

All business was for the time forgotten. What was business when Ted Scott, the idol of America, was flying over the city?

In the enthusiasm aroused by that spontaneous and royal welcome, the young aviator let

the plane out until it reached a hundred and ninety miles an hour.

"I'll get to two hundred and then let her down a bit," said Ted to himself. "No use in crowding her too much at the start."

He threw in more power and watched to see the meter creep up.

To his amazement it began to drop!

CHAPTER XXI

Whirring Rattles

Ted Scott's heart missed a beat as he noted the decreasing speed of the plane.

He had put on more speed, given her "the gun." Theoretically, she ought to have gained. Actually, she was losing.

In that daring reach for speed had he strained some part of the delicate machinery? He looked again at the indicator. It stood now at a hundred and eighty. Even as he looked it went to one hundred and seventy-five.

That of itself was tremendous speed. But under the conditions it ought to be more. Something was the matter. There could be no effect without a cause.

He blocked his controls and made a swift examination of the machinery. Various hypotheses were tried, only to be abandoned. And all this time the speed was decreasing.

Then he almost shouted with relief. He had found the source of the trouble. A feed pipe had become slightly clogged!

It was the work of but a moment to free the passage and resume his seat at the controls.

Now he gave her a burst of the gun and the *Comet* darted forward like a hound unleashed.

"Go it, old girl!" crowed Ted, in delight. "I knew you wouldn't balk without a reason. Now show me what you can do."

He had crossed the line into Pennsylvania now and was heading toward the Appalachians.

He would feel easier when he had crossed that formidable mountain range. Although not as dangerous as the Rockies, it had a reputation for treachery among airmen. They gave it a wide berth when they could, and when they had to cross it tightened their belts, set their teeth hard and prayed for luck.

But there was no use of meeting trouble halfway. He would cross that bridge—or range—when he came to it.

He was flying low now, not more than a thousand feet above the earth, to avoid the stiffer winds he would be likely to meet when he increased his altitude.

The country below him stretched out like a beautiful panorama.

As his plane sped on he caught glimpses of people rushing out of houses with their faces turned skyward as they heard the roar of the plane. For the whole country was stirred by

the flight and those in the probable line of it were on the alert. In the cities the streets and roofs were lined with eager spectators, some of whom had been waiting for hours to catch a glimpse of the nation's hero.

He pictured the disappointment that millions would feel if he failed to reach his goal, and the thought redoubled his determination to win.

There was another spur that would be sure to quicken his energies if they should tend to flag. That was the desire to fill with chagrin the scoundrels who had bet heavily against him, relying on their villainous plans to make him lose—the Gales, the thugs, Dago Dan, and the unknown schemers who had been responsible for the kidnapping. It would be sweet revenge for Ted Scott to know they would be compelled to pay out thousands of dollars when they had fondly counted on taking them in.

He suddenly realized that he was thirsty. He thought he would take a drink of water, but finally decided in favor of an orange.

There were a couple of dozen of these thrown together loosely in a burlap bag that was drawn together by a string at the neck.

He leaned back to draw the bag toward him when he stopped abruptly, his nostrils dilated, his breath coming fast.

The bag was moving.

At first Ted Scott thought that he must be

the victim of an hallucination. He stared at the bag transfixed.

There was no mistake. It was moving.

Not violently, but gently, with a soft, undulating motion almost like breathing, as though some living creature were waking from sleep.

As Ted looked, with horror growing in his eyes, he could distinguish a long rope-like something, resembling a series of loops, writhing and twisting.

There was something sinister, something nightmarish about that movement, something that froze Ted's blood in his veins.

It was only for a few moments however that the young aviator rested under the spell that seemed cast over him. He reached for his tool kit and drew out a sharp, long-handled hatchet.

He bent over and with the blade touched the moving thing. Instantly something hard struck the steel and there was an angry whir of rattles.

A rattlesnake was in the bag!

Perspiration started out in beads on Ted's forehead. The horror of the thing burst upon him. The utter vileness of the plot almost took his breath away.

Somehow, in loading the supplies into the plane, this bag with the reptile in it had been substituted for an innocent bag of oranges.

Probably the creature had been slightly doped so that it would not rouse from its lethargy until the plane was well under way.

The plan was infernally cunning and might easily have succeeded. The conspirators had figured that Ted would carelessly or absent-mindedly insert his hand into the bag and feel about for an orange and come in contact with the bag's hideous occupant. Then a lightning stroke and Ted Scott would be doomed!

The young aviator lifted the axe. The bag bulged at a point where the body pressed against it. The blade descended and cut the snake in half.

CHAPTER XXII

The Enshrouding Fog

There was a frightful floundering and thrashing about of the severed parts of the rattlesnake's body. Blood spurted through the cleft in the bag made by the hatchet and a red spray spattered on Ted Scott's clothes. He wiped it off with a shudder of repulsion and a sensation of nausea.

He waited until the commotion had ceased. Then he widened the tear with a slash of the hatchet and the part with the head attached tumbled out. Ted picked it up gingerly between two of his wrenches and cast it from the plane. He breathed more easily as he saw it whirling through the air.

He waited until he was passing over an uninhabited stretch of the country and hurled out the bag with all its contents. The oranges were probably uninjured, but he could not bear the thought of even touching anything that had come in contact with that slimy body.

Then, his nerves still quivering, he settled

down to the work of guiding the *Comet* on its course.

Only a few minutes before he had been congratulating himself that he had at last escaped the attacks of his enemies. But he had reckoned without their cruelty and cunning. Even in the air they were reaching out after him.

He pressed his arm against the telegram in his pocket that told him Charity would be praying for him. Surely she must have been praying at that moment of deadly peril!

He felt again the tug of thirst and reached for the water bottle. But before unscrewing the cap he reconsidered.

How did he know that that water which looked so crystal clear and inviting had not been doped or poisoned? He had learned by bitter experiences that his enemies had more than one string to their bow.

Then and there he made his resolve. He would touch no drop of water or coffee, eat no crumb of food until he had finished his flight.

It was a pity, too, for a most appetizing store of food had been provided for his journey. It irked him sorely to make the sacrifice. But it was a matter of abandoning the lesser for the greater good.

So over it went, every scrap. He was thoughtful enough to smash the bottles before

he threw them away lest they might fall in some soft place and have their contents sampled by some curious soul that might come across them.

"All the better if I get mighty hungry and thirsty," he consoled himself, with a whimsical grin. "It will make me the more eager to reach Los Angeles and get a square meal."

Up to the present time he had been favored with excellent weather and had not only kept up his schedule but gone beyond it. The *Comet* was working like a dream. Her motors kept up the steady hum that is sweeter than any symphony to the ears of the airman. Her buoyancy increased as she used up the gasoline, leaving her that much less load to carry. There was a gentle quartering wind that helped the plane along. Ted was piling up a margin.

He was elated at this, but not so elated as to become over confident. He knew how suddenly that margin might disappear if unfavorable conditions should arise.

It was up to him to make hay while the sun shone.

As he approached the Appalachians the sunshine that up to then had enveloped the plane began to lose some of its brilliancy. The dazzle was replaced by a sort of silver haze, beautiful in itself but not at all beautiful to Ted.

He knew what that haze portended. There

was every possibility—more than that, a likelihood—that it would deepen and thicken as he neared the mountains.

He pulled the stick and the plane darted upward. He hated to go higher, for the nearer he hugged the earth the faster he flew. But safety must not be sacrificed to speed.

In the upper strata, however, he did not find the greater clearness of the atmosphere for which he had hoped. The haze still clung about him. Beneath him it seemed like layers of white cotton wool on which the plane was floating. Above him it formed a canopy that momentarily grew more dense.

At the same time it became moister. It was ceasing to be haze and beginning to be fog. The stick was wet where the young aviator touched it. His hands were beaded with moisture. Little drops trickled down under his goggles and got into his eyes. The glass of the cockpit was obscured and he had to keep wiping it constantly.

Up and down he went, seeking better visibility. But with every moment things grew worse instead of better. There was no silver to the haze now. It had been transformed into a sodden, dripping fog that settled about the plane and its occupant like a pall.

Ted could not see ten feet in front of him. All landmarks had been blotted out and he was

forced to rely entirely upon his instruments attached to the board before him.

His brow creased with vexation. He had hoped that the weather would be especially clear as he neared the Appalachians, as he had planned to fly through one of the passes which he knew well and which was on a beeline with his projected course. In this way he could have saved considerable time and mileage.

But there was no use in hunting for that pass now. The peril of collision would be too great. He must climb and climb and climb until he was sure to be able to clear the highest peak in the range. If his altimeter failed him he might crash, and at the rate he was traveling that would mean death, instant and sure.

He did not slacken speed. On he whizzed through the murk like a bullet. But as he sped he gradually rose until he felt certain that even the highest peak must be below him instead of in front of him.

Even this certainty did not relieve him of anxiety. Mountain flying had its own peculiar perils. The air was full of "bumps" and "pockets." To strike one of the latter might mean that the plane would fall hundreds of feet like a plummet before it reached a bed of air that would furnish resistance. Then, too, there was that deadly downward draft in the

vicinity of deep gorges that had proved fatal to many an airman.

Still, these were all in the day's work of that dangerous profession and there was no use in dwelling upon them. They were bad enough when they came, if they came.

In this instance Ted Scott's luck held. He passed over the highest peaks of the range and was congratulating himself that these perils were overpast when, like a bolt from the blue, a cyclonic burst of wind struck the plane.

Struck it such a tremendous blow that the plane turned turtle! Struck it with such unbridled fury that Ted was torn from his straps and sent flying through space!

CHAPTER XXIII

Within an Ace of Death

For one awful moment, as he felt himself snatched from his seat and whirled through the air, Ted Scott thought that his fate was sealed.

Torn from his moorings, in touch with nothing tangible, an atom in space!

He threw out his hands instinctively and his right hand gripped something solid. He had come in contact with a strut of the plane.

He clutched it as a drowning man grasps at a straw. The wind sought to tear him loose, and his arm felt as though it were being wrenched from its socket. But he held on with frantic desperation and managed also to secure a grip with his other hand.

Around and around the plane whirled as though caught in a mælstrom, and the young aviator whirled with it.

It seemed ages, but it could have been only seconds when the gust had spent its fury and the rotary movement of the plane ceased. But the *Comet* was still reeling wildly and threat-

ened at any moment to take a nose dive to the earth.

Ted measured the distance to the cockpit and at the moment when he was at the highest point in the plane's convolutions gave a mighty swing and hurled himself in that direction.

He fell into the cockpit in a disordered heap. But he was on his feet in an instant and working at the controls.

In his bewildered state he was working more by instinct than calculation, but it was the instinct of the great flying genius and it did not play him false.

In a few crowded moments he succeeded in bringing the *Comet* to an even keel and straightened her out on her course.

When he knew to a certainty that this had been accomplished, he slumped back into his seat, utterly exhausted.

He was aching in every muscle. His arms were sore from the terrific tension he had experienced while being whirled through the air, and he had been badly bruised when he had tumbled back into the cockpit.

But he was alive! That one blessed fact overshadowed everything else.

He turned his thoughts to the plane. Had she been injured in that momentary but terrible commotion of the elements? It would not be surprising if something had yielded. But to

all appearances the *Comet* was as trim and taut as ever and the engines still kept up their strident but harmonious song.

He looked at his indicator. He had lost some mileage in the hurly-burly, but not enough to reduce his margin greatly. He had still nearly a hundred miles of surplus above his schedule.

And he had crossed the Appalachians! That in itself was a source of rejoicing.

Another cause for satisfaction was that the fog was rapidly thinning out. He could see a little way ahead of him and it soon shredded sufficiently to enable him to pick out some of the landmarks below him. The nightmare sense of flying blind was left behind.

None was more expert than Ted Scott in reading his instruments, but nevertheless there was always a chance of some of them going wrong. It was an immense comfort to have the use of his eyes to determine his course. Then, too, the risk of collision with a plane flying in the opposite direction was enormously diminished.

He was dropping down the western slope of the mountain range and going like the wind. Dusk came on and millions of lights began to spring up like fireflies in the villages and cities over which he flew.

He was over Ohio now and streaking across the Buckeye State like a rocket. There was

no wind to speak of, either for or against him, and he let out the *Comet* to the limit of her speed. He rejoiced that there were no traffic cops in the skies to lift up a warning hand.

Before he reached the Indiana border line he was a hundred and forty miles to the good and still gaining as he flew.

"A hundred and forty!" he chuckled to himself. "A nice little margin to have up my sleeve. Gee, if I could have this kind of weather all the way I'd make it in seventeen or eighteen hours, let alone twenty. But that's a mighty big if."

It was indeed, as he soon had occasion to know. Before he had covered the Hoosier State, a stiff wind began to blow from the west. It was not violent at first, but steady and sustained and constantly growing in power.

He had, of course, left the mountains far behind and so could hug the earth, where the wind was less hostile. At times he was not higher than five hundred feet and the sounds of the busy earth below mounted to his plane. The glow of the fires from foundries and steel plants bathed the plane in a rosy light. The whistles and bells of locomotives blended with the roar of his motors. It gave Ted a comforting sense of communion with his kind. He was of them, yet apart from them, a lonely voyager of the skies, yet bound by a million ties

to those whose feet had seldom left the earth.

He was hungry and thirsty, far more no doubt than he would have been had supplies been readily at hand. The mere fact that he did not have them made the thought of them infinitely alluring. He would almost have welcomed rain, so that he could gather a few drops of the precious fluid to moisten his parched mouth and throat.

It was fully dark now, and the heavens were spangled with stars. They did not contribute much to the visibility, but they gave him a sense of company. He knew them all, the more brilliant and important ones by name. He was so familiar with them that, had his instruments gone wrong, he could have steered by the heavenly bodies. Many a time they had been his only guides. They never deceived him, never went back on him. They were his brothers. They, like himself, were wanderers in the uncharted realms of space, cradled in infinity. There was kinship. No man had ever been so near them as Ted Scott. He thrilled as he remembered his altitude record, the unequaled flight that had carried him nearer to the blue vault of heaven than any one who had lived since the beginning of the world.

But he could not indulge long in musings, for the wind was growing in violence. Its steady character was changing, and it was becoming

gusty and turbulent. A veil was being drawn over the stars, hitherto so bright, and black masses of clouds were beginning to pile up on the horizon. There was more than a capful of wind in those clouds. A gale was brewing.

Still, it held off until Ted, driving like a demon, had crossed into Kansas, the district where cyclones were frequent and where sub-cellars for the farmers and their families to flee to were a matter of course in the rural regions.

The wind ceased suddenly, too suddenly to suit the young aviator. That abrupt cessation was unnatural. It was as though nature were holding her breath for one stupendous effort. It was the crouch of the wild beast before its spring.

The spring came! A terrific burst of wind struck the plane and tossed it about like a chip on the surface of Niagara.

Ted Scott was in the grip of a Kansas twister!

CHAPTER XXIV

The Fury of the Cyclone

How Ted Scott managed to keep his plane afloat for the next few minutes he never knew.

It seemed a miracle that the structure was not ripped apart. One less stout and well constructed could never have outlived that terrible blow.

It was whirled around and around to every point of the compass. It was twisting in a seemingly crazy dance of death. The wind was coming from all quarters at once. To guide the plane was impossible. All that the young aviator could hope to do was to keep it so nearly on an even keel that it would not get utterly out of his control and plunge down to the earth. He had to crouch low to prevent being blown out of the plane. He knew now what a Kansas cyclone meant.

Luckily, it was as brief as it was terrible, or the young aviator could not have survived. Like a ship tossed on the billows, the *Comet* reeled and rocked for a few minutes on the

waves of the air left as an aftermath of the storm. Then Ted gradually got it in hand.

Ted's first need was to seek altitude, as the plane had been driven perilously near the earth. He pulled the stick and the plane darted upward. But he noted with anxiety that it did not shoot up with its customary ease and grace. There was something lumbering about the motion.

Something was wrong. The *Comet* had outlived the twister, but it had not escaped the storm unscathed.

Ted flashed his light about the structure. All the struts had held. The engines had not been damaged and were working as usual.

He turned the glare upon the wings. The left one was untouched. But his heart sank as he noted that the right one was drooping slightly. There was a slight fracture halfway along its length, slight now, but one that he knew would steadily widen under the strain of flying.

On an ordinary trip he would have sought at once to make a landing and set about repairs. But that was forbidden by the nature of the contest. If he as much as touched the earth, he would have lost the race and all the issues depending on it. Dago Dan and his like would have triumphed just as certainly as though Ted had been bitten by the rattlesnake.

There was no alternative. Although he knew it was at the risk of his life, he must repair that injured wing in mid-air.

He lessened the speed, blocked the control, and with tools and material from his kit climbed out on the wing of the plane.

The wind caught him and he had to hold on for dear life, flattening his body as close to the wing as he could to lessen the resistance.

Inch by inch he crept forward until he had reached the injured part. Then, with infinite precaution, he set to work, holding on with one hand while he worked with the other when that was possible. But there were times when he had to use both hands, and at those times he knew that it was only the toss of the dice whether he lived or died.

But the fortune that favors the brave was with him, and at last his work was done. It was well done, too, for however great the temptation to hurry, he knew that his very life as well as the successful completion of his task depended upon thoroughness.

It was with a sigh of relief that he again reached the cockpit and dropped into his seat. But he was amply rewarded when the plane responded to his slightest touch as readily as it had when he had taken off from Boston.

Now that the strain was over, Ted had time

to estimate his position and the distance he had traversed.

He had a sense of dismay as he finished his calculations. The head winds he had encountered culminating with the encounter with the twister and the repairs to his plane had wiped out the surplus he had piled up in the earlier stages of the race. He no longer had anything "up his sleeve." On the contrary, he was a little behind his schedule.

Behind his schedule! And the Rockies still in front of him!

But they were yet a long way in front of him, and until he reached them he had hundreds of miles to travel over level country. It was there, if anywhere, that he must catch up with his schedule and start accumulating another surplus.

He gave the *Comet* the gun and she darted through the air like a thing possessed.

She scooted over the "bad lands" and down into New Mexico. The heat was oppressive, but the air stirred up by the plane made it bearable, though Ted was suffering tortures from thirst. He was faint, too, from hunger. But all these physical sufferings were as nothing, lost in the fever that consumed him to finish his race in triumph.

And he was winning! His heart sang with

exultation. The *Comet* was flying as she never had before. For hours now she had made almost two hundred miles for every sixty minutes that passed. She was splitting the atmosphere like an arrow. She was fairly eating up space. All the deficit had been wiped out and Ted Scott was a hundred and fifty miles to the good.

Then the air grew chillier and Ted knew that his greatest danger was at hand.

He was nearing the Rockies!

CHAPTER XXV

The Final Sprint

The Rockies!

Those grim sentinels of the western part of the continent! Those towering peaks capped with eternal snows! Those treacherous gorges!

Dangerous for an airman to attempt to cross at any time! Doubly, trebly dangerous at night!

Ted Scott throttled down to three-quarter speed and sought altitude. Up and up he went until he had reached a height of twelve thousand feet.

There was no moon, or his task would have been easier. He was flying blind, depending wholly on his instruments.

He had flown for possibly half an hour when he struck an air pocket and dropped like a stone for two thousand feet. It took only a few moments, but it seemed an eternity to the young aviator before he could get a grip on the air and begin again his ascent.

A little later he encountered a downward draft as he was flying over the gorges, and it

was only by superb airmanship that he escaped being dashed against a peak whose outline he could barely discern as he finally capped it.

He must give himself a better margin, and he shot up until he had reached an altitude of seventeen thousand feet.

But this, though it lowered the danger of collision, had its own perils, for the air was so rarefied that he could scarcely breathe. His lungs were laboring with the effort. He began to feel dizzy and lightheaded.

He had recourse to the oxygen tank that he had brought along with a view to just such an emergency, and this, though it was annoying and cumbrous, relieved him for the moment. He comforted himself with the reflection that he would not have to endure it long. As soon as he should reach the further slope of the range he could afford to dispense with it.

The air became intensely cold and Ted shivered within his thick clothing. There was over a hundred degrees difference between that atmosphere and the sweltering heat of the plains of New Mexico. Something began to beat against the windows of the cockpit. Sleet and hail threatened to break the glass. A fierce wind accompanied it, blowing directly into the teeth of the plane.

A few minutes later Ted found himself in the midst of a howling blizzard. It shrieked

like a demon and tore at the plane as though it would rip it into matchwood.

For the howling and the cold Ted Scott cared nothing. What did alarm him seriously was the lack of buoyancy of the plane. It was lumbering along like a bird with crippled wings. He knew too well the reason. It was the same peril that had threatened him on his trip across the Atlantic. The sleet had formed on the wings and was bearing them down.

Lower and lower the plane descended. The young aviator strove desperately to maintain his altitude, but to no avail. A little lower and he would be beneath the level of the highest peaks and at any moment might crash into one of them head on.

He had one resource left that he was rather reluctant to test.

In building the *Comet* he had had wires inserted running along the wings through which an electric current could be sent with the idea of furnishing warmth enough to melt the sleet.

It had been installed with great care, but there was always the possible danger of the insulation proving imperfect or of a short circuit, a danger increased in this case by the previous damage to the wing and the wrenches both had endured in the gales. If such injury existed, the wing might catch fire.

There was no help for it, however, and Ted

Scott took the chance. To his delight, it worked. The sleet gradually melted away and the *Comet,* released from the burden, again shot up above the danger line.

It was a danger averted, but it brought its penalties, for during the time it had taken to accomplish it the plane had made but little progress. As a matter of fact, it had lost, for the blizzard had driven it off its course.

Again that precious surplus had been wiped out and a deficit had taken its place.

But the highest part of the range had now been passed. The new altimeter that Ted had installed told him that the distance between him and the earth was constantly increasing. Ted knew, therefore, that the mountains were sloping downward.

He would soon be over level ground again. There would be other high places to cross, but not so many and not so perilous. He could straighten out on the last lap of his journey to Los Angeles.

Now, too, the night was passing. In the east the clouds were turning from black to a dim gray. The rosy fingers of Dawn were beginning to reach up over the horizon.

It was an incalculable relief for the young airman not to have to rely longer on his instruments. Now he could see where he was

going, and his spirits rose as the light grew stronger.

In that growing light he caught sight of two planes coming in his direction. At first he thought that they might be the vanguard of the planes sent out to meet him as a token of honor. In his distinguished career he had become used to such courtesies.

But he dismissed that thought as soon as conceived. He was too far from his journey's end for that. Los Angeles was still hundreds of miles away.

That the pilots of the oncoming planes had seen the *Comet* was evident by the fact that they changed their line of course and converged toward him one on either side.

"Coming near enough to say hello," thought Ted to himself.

Then the thought of that misadventure on the way to Boston occurred to him. He snatched up his glasses and studied the planes. He noticed that each held several men. This was in itself unusual. The planes, too, had no markings. That was still more unusual. Honest men do not try to conceal their identity.

They were heavy planes, also, while his own was built for speed. In the event of a collision, he would be far more likely to be the sufferer.

They were converging closely now as though

to crowd him off his course, deprive him of steerage way, press him down to a landing.

He dropped his glasses, picked up his shotgun and waved it at them.

"Keep off!" he shouted.

A pistol cracked and a bullet whistled past his head so closely that he could feel the wind of it.

Instantly Ted fired at the nearer plane. There was a yell of pain and the pilot relinquished his hold of the stick and nursed a wounded hand.

Ted swung his weapon around and let the second plane have the other barrel. Again there were shouts of anger or excitement and the occupants were thrown into confusion. They had not anticipated such a hot reception by their intended victim.

Ted, with a lightning-like motion, pulled the stick and the *Comet* shot upward. Shots flew after the plane and one of the bullets embedded itself in the fuselage.

A moment later Ted was beyond range and laying his course straight as a die toward Los Angeles.

One of the planes attempted to follow, but there was no more chance of catching up with the *Comet* than a tortoise would have had of overtaking a deer, and Ted had soon lost the pursuing plane over the horizon.

So even up to the last his enemies were trying to defeat him! They had guessed as to his probable course and had taken a chance of finding him.

Well, they had found him, Ted said to himself grimly, and were none too pleased with the finding. He wondered how greatly they had been injured. He knew that small shot at that distance could not kill, but could be very painful. He chuckled at the thought of the thugs digging the pellets out of various parts of their persons. He hoped it would take them a good long time.

But his chuckles died away as he estimated the distance that yet remained to be traversed and the time he had left to do it in.

No more talk of a hundred and fifty miles an hour! An exclamation of dismay rose to his lips. The various mishaps and delays he had encountered had put him so far behind that he would have to average two hundred and three miles an hour to win!

Could he do it? Would the gallant plane respond to such a tremendous call upon its powers? He had reached that point in occasional burts of speed, but only for a few minutes. Would he dare risk that speed for the entire distance that remained. Could the *Comet* stand the strain?

She must! It would be maddening to lose

the race on the very last lap. Yet he would lose it, if he were even one minute overtime. Someway, somehow, he must beat that last fatal minute!

He eased the throttle up to full and kept it there. And then there was such flying as California had never seen!

Over the orange groves, over the smiling fields, over the silver rivers, the *Comet* shot with engines roaring. On she went like a streak of lightning.

Ted had left Boston at three o'clock in the afternoon. Twenty hours flying time would mean reaching Los Angeles at eleven o'clock the next morning, Boston time. But as the time between the coasts had a difference of three standard hours, that meant that it would be eight o'clock, Los Angeles time, when he must reach that city.

On sped the plane like a meteor shooting across the sky. She was quivering beneath the pressure of the engines and threatening to fly apart. But Ted, crouching low in the cockpit to offer as little resistance to the wind as possible, kept her at full throttle.

He must win! For himself, for Walter Hapworth, for Paul Monet, for the thousands, perhaps millions, who had wagered on his skill and daring. For the discomfiture of Dago Dan and his confederates, the thugs, the Gales, all

the scoundrels who had sought his undoing.

A hundred and ninety! A hundred and ninety-five! Two hundred! Two hundred and five! Two hundred and ten! Two hundred and fifteen! And there the figures remained stationary. The *Comet* had reached her limit.

No, not quite. Enough to win, perhaps, but Ted Scott did not want to win by an eyelash.

He tapped the special tank he held in reserve for especially high-powered gas. He did not dare use it often. But he was going to use it now.

The effect was almost instantaneous. The *Comet* leaped as though she had been struck. Her speed now was hair-raising.

Up crept the figures. Two hundred and seventeen! Two hundred and twenty!

Now the city of Los Angeles was in sight.

Two hundred and twenty-two! Two hundred and twenty-five!

It was at two hundred and twenty-seven miles an hour that Ted Scott shot into the sky above the Los Angeles flying field and brought the *Comet* to a perfect landing.

He had won the race against time from coast to coast with twenty-two minutes to spare!

Ted stepped out of the cockpit, to be fairly swamped by the immense crowd that had been waiting there since dawn for the sighting of his plane. Every one was trying at once to get

near enough to touch his hand or pat his shoulder. It was all the police could do by forming a flying wedge to get him through the throng, almost insane with excitement at the wonderful exploit.

Within five minutes the news had been flashed to every part of America that its idol had once more triumphed in making the best time between the oceans that had ever been made by man.

But the tribute paid Ted Scott in Los Angeles, great as it was, was as nothing to the overwhelming greeting that welcomed him on his return to Bromville. There, people from all over the State had assembled to do him homage, and the little city itself was bursting with pride and joy.

That Ted should enjoy the ovation was simply saying that he was human. But the clamor of the crowds was nothing to him compared to his joy in meeting those who were especially dear to his heart.

Eben, Charity—how dear old Charity hugged him and wept happily over him!

"I was praying for you day and night, Ted," she said.

"I know it, Mother," replied Ted, his voice husky with emotion, as he held her form closer to him, "and believe me, there were times when I needed your prayers."

Walter Hapworth and Mr. Monet were enthusiastic in their congratulations.

"I knew you'd do it, Ted!" cried Walter, as he shook hands. "You've never disappointed me yet. And how we've cleaned up on it! Ten thousand for you and fifteen thousand apiece for Paul and me! Won't that crowd of golf players be sore when they have to shell out! But I tell you straight, Ted, I'd rather have lost every cent I put up than to have had anything happen to you."

"I know that, Walter," replied Ted, as he tightened his grip on his friend's hand.

"We haven't been idle while you were gone," put in Paul Monet with a smile. "We've landed the Gales in jail."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Ted.

"The whole lot of them," declared Mr. Monet. "One of their confederates—what is it you Americans say?—peached on them in regard to the bomb explosion. Of course the Gales denied it, but the evidence was so strong that they've been arrested and held for trial."

"I guess they've reached the end of their rope," put in Walter Hapworth, "and a good thing it will be for the community. They've been an evil influence here for years. But I won't be wholly satisfied unless that Dago Dan and his tools can be rounded up."

This latter proved a difficult task, but it was

accomplished at last and the unprincipled scoundrel, who, as Walter Hapworth had surmised, was the head of a nation-wide gambling ring, was convicted of having instigated the Boston kidnapping and given a long term in prison. His tools received lighter sentences, and some who turned state's evidence were let off altogether.

The proof against the Gales was strong enough to convince a jury that there was no doubt of their guilt and they were sentenced to several years' imprisonment.

"I've had a lot of fun out of this coast to coast race," remarked Ted to Walter Hapworth one day before the head of the gambling ring had been captured, "but there's one thing needed to make my happiness complete."

"What is that, greedy?"

"Five minutes alone with Dago Dan," replied Ted Scott.

THE END

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